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SONGLINES

FOLK & FESTIVAL ISSUE

Avalanche Kaito
Belgian-Burkinabé trio bring the noise

Sväng
Finland's harmonica powerhouse turns 20

UK Festival Guide 2024

MARGARETH MENEZES

From Carnival Queen to Brazil's Minister of Culture

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Folk Special!

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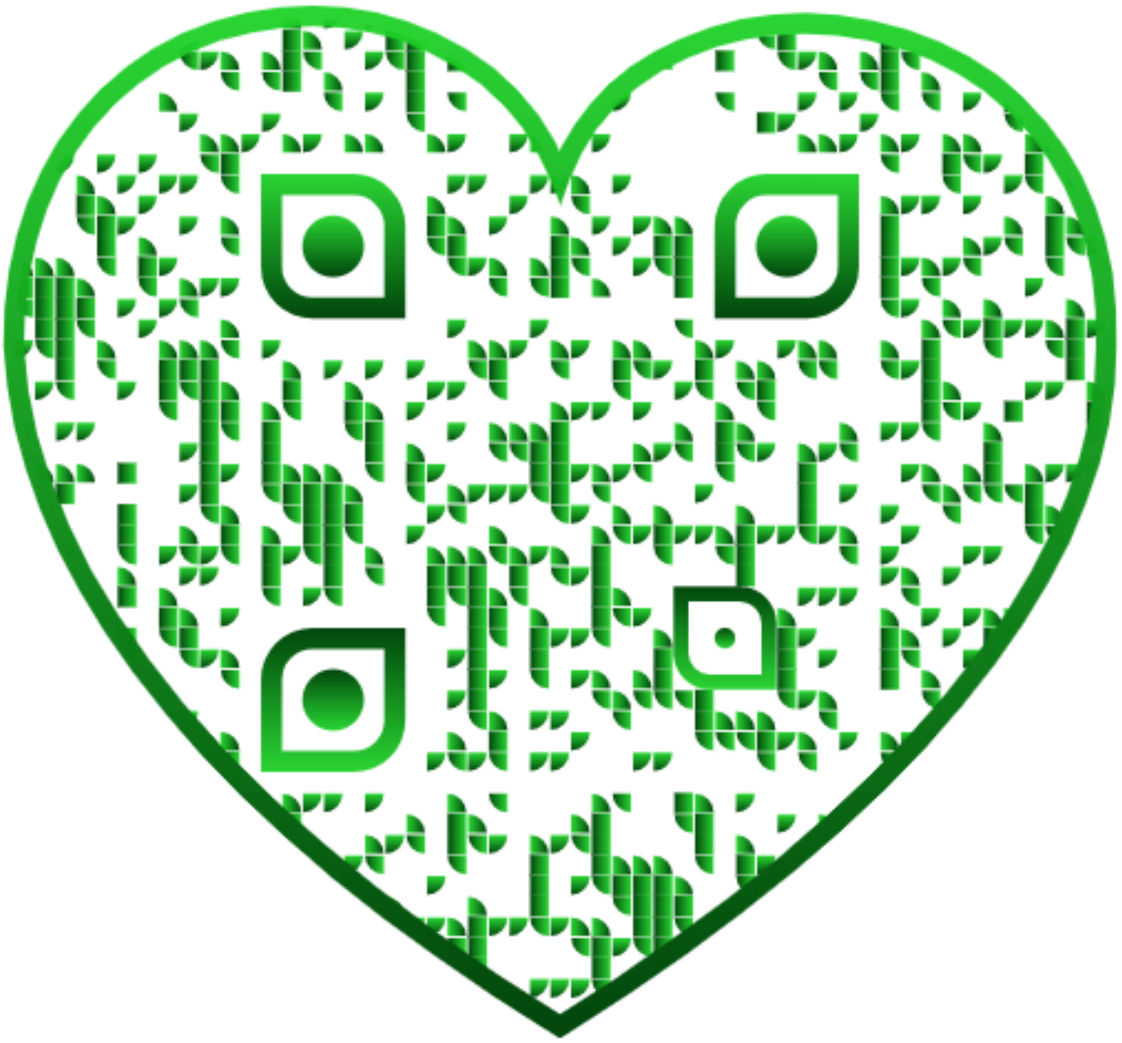

XXIV

FMMSINES

FESTIVAL MÚSICAS DO MUNDO

20▸27 JUL

2024

ADÉDÈJÌ ANA FRANGO ELÉTRICO AVALANCHE KAITO CAAMAÑO & AMEIXEIRAS CARA DE ESPELHO DAM DUARTE DUNGEN ELIADES OCHOA FATTU DJAKITE FERRO GAITA FLORENCE ADOONI & BAND GROUNDATION GYEDU-BLAY AMBOLLEY & HIS SEKONDI BAND HAYA ZAATRY ILE JOSÉ MANUEL DAVID JP SIMÕES CANTA JOSÉ MÁRIO BRANCO KOMODRAG & THE MOUNODOR LA CHIVA GANTIVA LA DELIO VALDEZ LA MUCHACHA & EL PROPIO JUNTE LÍVIA MATTOS MADEMOISELLE MARGARETH MENEZES MAYRA ANDRADE MELINGO MESTIZO MEZERG MOMO. MOTICOMA ORCHESTRE TOUT PUISSANT MARCEL DUCHAMP ORQUESTRA LOCOMOTIVA+JONI SCHWALBACH+VASCO MARTINS PRÉTU-XEI DI KOR RED RIZAN SAID SAIGON SOUL REVIVAL SALVADOR SOBRAL SAMBA TOURÉ SITI & THE BAND SOFIANE SAIDI SON ROMPE PERA TRÊS TRISTES TIGRES

MUSIC WITH A SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE

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Protect the pipeline

Burd Ellen's Debbie Armour kicked things off in nonchalant fashion. Confessing to having a cold, her voice was having none of it, soaring as she sang songs from across the Burd Ellen catalogue, and a brace of traditionals. Performing without bandmate Gayle Brogan, she had organised the gig, providing support to Cerys Hafana, who would soon be on stage with her triple harp. Not as imposing as a Celtic harp, what's amazing is what Hafana can do with it, her reimaginings of Welsh ballads and hymns like 'Tragwyddoldeb' made the room vibrate with every plucked string. Her recent forays into English and Scottish songs on *The Bitter* EP added variety and anecdotes, while the few songs she played on electric guitar made it clear she's no one-trick pony.

Why am I writing this? Because the week after Cerys Hafana and Burd Ellen played at The Chameleon in Nottingham, the venue was no more, the building's owner finally deciding to sell up. Though The Chameleon was little known – it had no sign and was only reachable via a dark alleyway – it was in a prime location off Nottingham's Old Market Square, and rumours had circulated for some time that it was in danger. It's gone the way of so many other grassroots venues across the UK.

In a report published at the beginning of the year, the Music Venues Trust (MVT) found that 125 UK venues had stopped putting on live music in 2023, with over half of those shutting entirely. The report found financial stresses as the chief cause, with rent and utility bills soaring. They said it was the sector's *'most challenging year'* of the past decade.

MVT have an ambitious plan to stem the decline: they want £1 from *'every ticket sold at arena- and stadium-level [gigs to] contain a £1 contribution to the grassroots ecosystem.'* With Taylor Swift's *Eras* tour grossing over £1bn, contrary to most artists who struggle to turn any profit from touring, the idea has been dubbed the *'Taylor Swift tax.'* MVT have set January 1, 2025 as their deadline to make this £1 levy happen.

Something has to be done. DIY venues like The Chameleon are essential. With a capacity of 70 people, it's where Alasdair Roberts last performed in Notts, where I first saw Sleaford Mods at a cabaret night in 2008; it had the best sound in the city thanks to ever-present sound guy Simon, and it was where I once put on a gig. All it involved was speaking to the old owner Nick, who scribbled my name on an available date in his diary; it was on me to sort everything else. In other words, it made it accessible. Is that too much to ask?

Russ Slater Johnson, Editor

CONTRIBUTORS THIS ISSUE INCLUDE

Olivia Cheves
Based in London, Olivia is a writer and editor keen to explore the seams between traditional, modern and experimental music. She speaks to British composer and improvisor Laura Cannell (p28).

Oleno Netto
Oleno is a writer interested in interviewing artists from all art forms about their creative processes. This issue, he speaks to Brazil's Minister of Culture, Margareth Menezes, on p24.

Izzy Felton
A journalist who has worked on a variety of magazines and podcasts, Izzy is the newest member of our editorial team. She chats to Ibibio Sound Machine (p13) and meets English folk music's next generation (p37).

Songlines was launched in 1999 and is the definitive magazine for world music – music that has its roots in all parts of the globe, from Mali to Mexico, India to Iraq. Whether this music is defined as traditional, contemporary, folk or fusion, *Songlines* is the only magazine to truly represent and embrace it. However, *Songlines* is not just about music, but about how the music fits into the landscape; it's about politics, history and identity. Delivered in both print and digital formats, *Songlines*, through its extensive articles and reviews, is your essential and independent guide to a world of music and culture, whether you are starting on your journey of discovery or are already a seasoned fan.

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MA Education & Music
Part of
Mark Allen
www.markallengroup.com

Songlines is published by
MA Education & Music Ltd
St Jude's Church, Dulwich Rd,
London, SE24 0PB, UK
info@songlines.co.uk

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ISSN 1464-8113.
Printed by Pensord Press Ltd, Dowlais, CF48 3TD

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"I am 30 years old, but I'm still learning. I wasn't even part of a Mayan ceremony until 2012! Now, it's part of me – a way to approach life and existence"

Guatemalan singer-songwriter Sara Curruchich talks discovering music, cosmovisions and the power of shared humanity on p18

Sara Curruchich / Xeloj

TOP OF THE WORLD

On this issue's compilation – our curated selection of new music and bonus tracks from across the globe

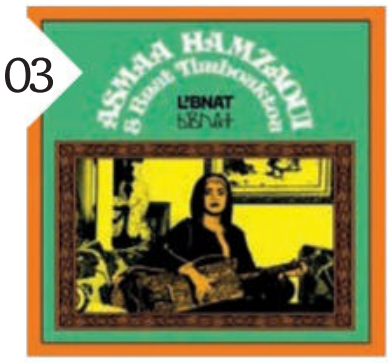
TOP OF THE WORLD TRACKS

01 **Aynur**
'Rabe Edlayê'
From *Rabe* on Aynur / Dreyer Gaido

Over a whirling background of strings and percussion '*Rabe!*' (Rise Up) is chanted in Aynur's curling, smooth tones. An anthem proving her status as a premier voice of the Kurdish people. **See p68**

02 **Tidiane Thiam**
'Dannibe Pinne'
From *Africa Yontii* on Sahel Sounds

Elegant, intricate and pensive guitar work born from a traditional melody. Evoking the light sounds of the *kora*, Tidiane encourages future generations to remember those who came before them. **See p52**



03 **Asmâa Hamzaoui & Bnat Timbouktou**
'Laâfou'
From *L'Bnat* on ajabu!

Hamzaoui and the 'Daughters of Timbuktu' pay tribute to women with strident call-and-response, bass-thumping *gimbri* and the occasional festive ululation. **See p51**

04 **Avalanche Kaito**
'Tanvusse'
From *Talitakum* on Glitterbeat Records

Kaito Winse's fast-running rap cuts through, above tinny percussion, a chorus of cries and dissonant electronica, in a clattering, crashing, free-flying, perfect storm of noise. **See p70**

05 **Las Lloronas**
'Naranjos'
From *Out of the Blue* on Muziekpublique

Gentle trumpet backs the trio's soft, deft harmonies as they sing in Spanish and French, reflecting on their birthplaces and the coming together of different musical traditions. **See p72**

06 **Canberk Ulas**
'A New Beginning'
From *Echoes of Becoming* on Jazzland Recordings

The strong, yearning sound of Ulas' *duduk* leads poignantly in this ethereal soundscape: a rich, layered meditation on the Turkey-born, Sweden-based musician's future. **See p69**

07 **Cyril Cyril**
'Microonda Sahara'
From *Le Futur Ça Marche Pas* on Les Disques Bongo Joe

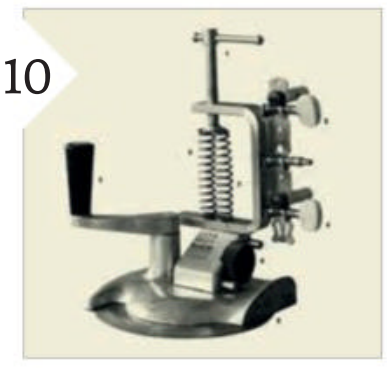
A marching drum beat provides the anchor for a kaleidoscopic mesh of rock, rap, surf guitar and psychedelia, all topped by vocals from the Meridian Brothers' Eblis Àlvarez. **See p58**

08 **Bab L' Bluz**
'AmmA'
From *Swaken* on Real World Records

Launched by crashing, reverb-heavy electric *gimbri* and Yousra Mansour's crystal clear vocals, this spiralling, feminist call plunges the Gnawa sound perfectly into rock'n'roll. **See p71**

09 **Hajda Banda**
'Jabloczko'
From *Hajda!* on Karrot Kommando

Translating as 'The Apple', joyful energy, riddled with frenzied violin, accordion and vocals, tell the tumultuous tale of '*a difficult love between a Belarusian girl and a Polish boy.*' **See p60**



10 **ZA! + Perrate**
'Jolifanto'
From *Jolifanto* on Lovemonk

Perrate's detached vocals circle discordant synth and percussion from the avant-garde electronic duo ZA! for an unsettling, compelling sound that develops until its cathartic, hedonistic conclusion. **See p62**

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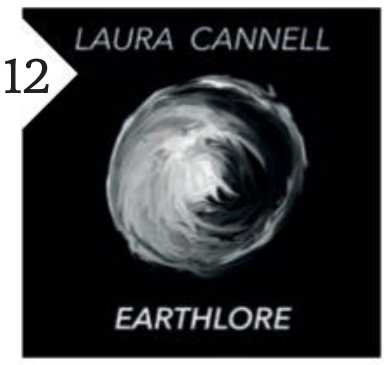
+ BONUS NEW FOLK TRACKS

11 **Landless**
'The Fisherman's Wife'
From *Lúireach* on Glitterbeat Records

With harmonies allowing each voice its place, the vocal quartet cover Ewan MacColl's song giving voice to the women who worked as hard as their fisherman husbands, with little recognition. **See p30**



12 **Laura Cannell**
'When I Returned You Were Gone'
From *EARTHLORE on Brawl Records*

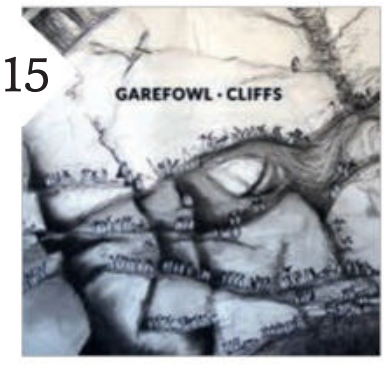
From Cannell's 2024 *Years of Lore* series, in which she will release an EP every month, comes this meditative, swaying string-filled soundscape. **See p28**

13 **Jacken Elswyth**
'Lost Gander'
From *At Fargrounds* on Wrong Speed Records

Banjo-maker and player extraordinaire, Elswyth (of Shovel Dance Collective) explores improvisation, harmonics and drones with a wholesome, warm and gentle melody. **See p32**

14 **Daisy Rickman**
'Bleujen an Howl'
From *Howl* on Daisy Rickman

In this 'Sunflower' the Cornish Rickman showcases her deep, soulful voice nestled within rhythmic, slightly off-kilter guitar for a swaying psychedelic sound reminiscent of the 60s. **See p36**



15 **Garefowl**
'Cas na Caora Hiortaich O (Oh! The Legs of the St Kilda Sheep)'
From *Cliffs* on Penny Fiddle Records

Ewan MacDonald and co salute the sheep of St Kilda as part of a project inspired by the uninhabited Scottish isle. **See p35**

James Hole

"It gives me enormous satisfaction that wherever I go in Manchester now, there's a line that's more or less the unofficial motto of the city, which is actually written by a scouser, which was me"

Find out how screenwriter and author Frank Cottrell-Boyce made his mark in Manchester and how punk, kids' TV themes and Irish jigs soundtracked many favourite memories on p74

TOP OF THE WORLD ALBUM DOWNLOAD

To download our *Top of the World* compilation please visit
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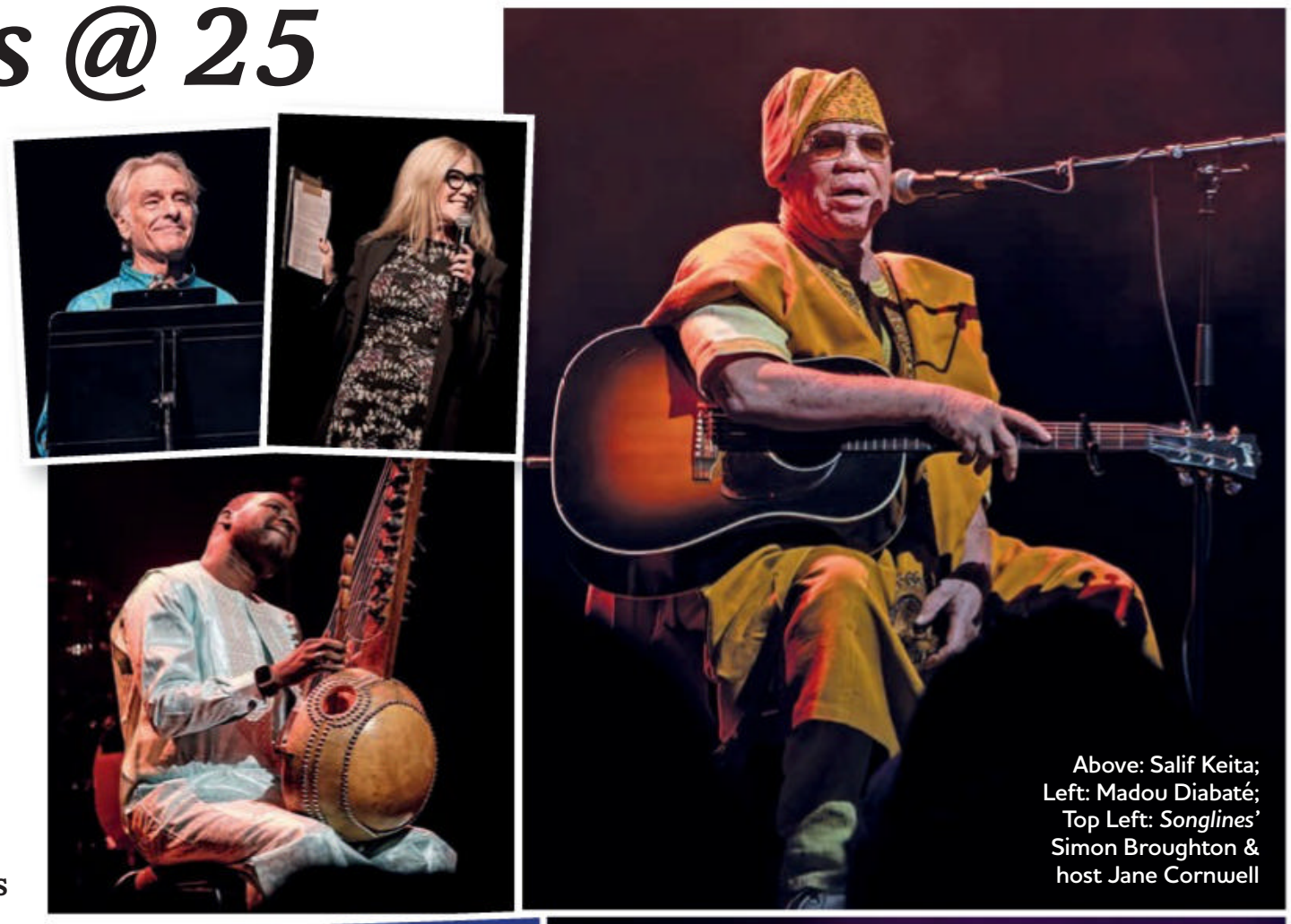
or use the QR code to the left

Songlines @ 25

On March 25, we held a concert at the Barbican to celebrate 25 years of Songlines. The evening featured sets from Le Vent du Nord, Divanhana, Balimaya Project and Salif Keita & Madou Diabaté. Thanks so much to everyone for coming and making the night such a success. Here are some of our highlights…

PHOTOS BY **COLIN MILLER, JAMIE HODGSKIN & MIGUEL SANTOS**



Above: Salif Keita; Left: Madou Diabaté; Top Left: *Songlines'* Simon Broughton & host Jane Cornwell

Le Vent du Nord

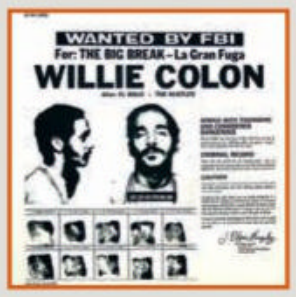
Divanhana

Balimaya Project

Divanhana

THE **GLOBE** AT A **GLANCE**

AUSTRIA: researchers in Austria and Germany analysed the lyrics of over 350,000 English-language songs across five broad genres of music to discover that '*lyrics have become simpler over time regarding multiple aspects of lyrics: vocabulary richness, readability, complexity, and the number of repeated lines.*' Their paper was published in the *Scientific Reports* journal... **CHECHNYA:** '*The musical culture of the Chechens was diverse in tempo and methodology. We must bring to the people and to the future of our children the cultural heritage of the Chechen people,*' said the Chechen Ministry of Culture in April. '*From now on, all musical, vocal and choreographic works must correspond to the tempo of 80 to 116 beats per minute,*' he added, as part of a new, government law to remove Western influences from Chechen music... **MEXICO:** a war has erupted in Mazatlán between *banda* musicians and those involved in the tourist trade, with the latter accusing the former of being too noisy and driving away tourists. Suggested regulations of curfews and limited banda groups have seen musicians protest in the city. The story went viral when NASA scientists – in town to watch the solar eclipse – danced banda through the streets in support... **SERBIA:** *Nedelja* (Sunday), a biopic about the life of Serbian Romani singer Džej Ramadanovski (1964-2020) has proven successful in national cinemas, and in neighbouring Balkan countries, since being released at the start of the year... **US:** Craft Latino have announced a reissue campaign to commemorate 60 years of New York City's premier Latin music label, Fania Records. Over a dozen classic albums will be reissued, beginning with Willie Colón and Héctor Lavoe's 1970 gem *La Gran Fuga* (The Big Break), as well as a box set of celebrated singles (out September 15)

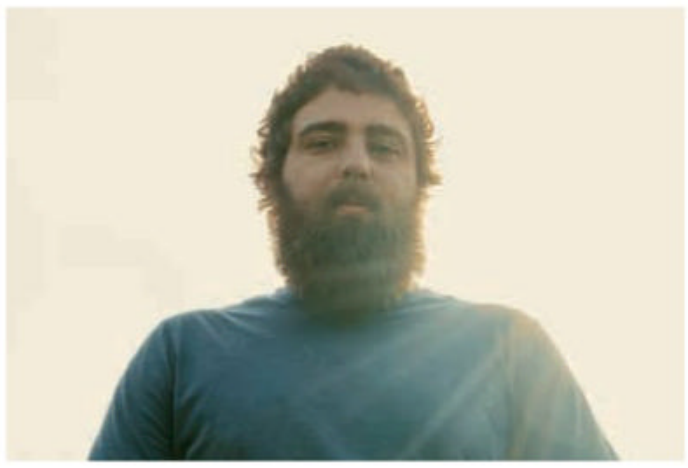


L-R: Williams, Wellington, Kater, Blount

Justin French

Dangerfield of Dreams

Jake Blount, Kaïa Kater, Tray Wellington and Nelson Williams have joined forces to create a new supergroup, New Dangerfield, with the aim of spotlighting Black string band traditions and reckoning with '*a century of forgetfulness and erasure*.' Their first single 'Dangerfield Newby' is named after a Black abolitionist from the 1800s who died during John Brown's raid.



From Awards to Wards

Fresh from winning Singer of the Year at the Gradam Ceoil TG4 awards for traditional music, Eoghan Ó Ceannabháin launched a campaign for election to Dublin City Council as a candidate for People Before Profit, a party vowing to tackle Ireland's housing crisis and '*bring radical change*.' Ispíní na hÉireann and many other members of the Irish music community played at the launch.

Nature Climbs the Charts

NATURE has launched a recording career, with David Bowie & Brian Eno, Blinky Bill, Cosmo Sheldrake and Bomba Estéreo some of her many collaborators, and a Spotify profile to prove it. It's part of an initiative called Sounds Right with all of NATURE's streaming royalties distributed to climate crisis projects through Earth/Percent.

+ *https://soundsright.earth*

Vieux Confirmed for Encounters

Vieux Farka Touré has been added to the line-up for *Songlines Encounters Festival* at Kings Place, London. The Malian guitarist will play a Fundraiser for Gaza on May 17. Asmâa Hamzaoui & Bnat Timbouktou, Enji, Soema Montenegro and The Scorpios are also on the line-up for the festival, which will take place May 16-19.

+ *https://www.kingsplace.co.uk/sef*

JE PENSE À TOI

Currently on the Songlines stereo...

Nana Benz du Togo – *Tite - Kiledjian Remixes*
Vocal and infectious *vodoun* rhythms from the Togolese five-piece are made to echo and dance anew in these trance-inducing remixes.

Amadou & Mariam 'Mogolu'
The irrepressible Malian duo move into the electric-funk zone with a playful single teasing an upcoming album.

Los Bitchos 'La Bomba'
Shiny Turkish-psych stomper from the female four-piece who have announced an extensive tour of Europe and the US.

Tamesis – *Magna Mater*
A serious 70s acid-folk hangover from these Sussex upstarts who were surely born 50 years too late.

RAH & The Ruffcats 'Agidi'
Driving, deftly detailed and delightfully on the front-foot Afrobeat from this eight-piece Berlin institution who have a new album on the way.

Altın Gün 'Vallahi Yok' / 'Kırık Cam'
Merve Daşdemir leaves the group with a bang in this last release filled with psychedelic swirls, gritty guitar and her own airy vocals.

IT'S HAPPENING

BEYOND THE BASSLINE: 500 YEARS OF BLACK BRITISH MUSIC (April 26 – August 26) at the British Library is a major exhibition celebrating Black music in Britain through soundscapes, artworks, films and complementary events... **MR WILSON'S PRESENTS *OPAL'S COMET*** (May 22-27) will see Sonya Moorhead and The Greyhounds perform their *Opal's Comet* song cycle upon a barge as part of CultureDale 2024. They will be making their way from one end of the Calder Valley to the other... Serial global collaborator and a serious force in New York City's underground jazz scene **ILHAN ERSAHIN** (May 24-25) and his Istanbul Sessions band will be playing two nights at Ronnie Scott's... Founding member of Muzsikás and Hungarian folk music champion **MÁRTA SEBESTYÉN** (June 22) is making a rare visit to the UK for Manchester's Góbéfest... A Cross Currents Trio featuring Zakir Hussain, Dave Holland & Chris Potter and the Anouar Brahem Quartet are some of the first names announced for this year's **EFG LONDON JAZZ FESTIVAL** (Nov 15-24)... An exciting multi-city Portuguese festival, **SQUARE** (Jan 29 – Feb 1 2025), has been announced with an open call for musicians from Africa, the Americas and Europe to sign up for a chance to perform

BONUS CD NEXT ISSUE

Our next issue, July 2024 (#199), will come with a special Morgenland Festival CD featuring live recordings captured at the festival by the likes of Jivan Gasparyan, Alim Qasimov, Kayhan Kalhor & Toumani Diabaté and Wu Man

Ana Lua Caiano

After years of listening to traditional music and protest songs, Björk and Portishead, one of Portugal's most exciting new singers tells ***Gonçalo Frota*** how she created a world all her own

Teresa Com Certeza

Time has moved fast for Ana Lua Caiano. Strangely, the COVID-19 pandemic set the grounds for the meteoric rise of the 24-year-old Portuguese singer-songwriter. In 2020, once the lockdown came into effect, she directed all attention and creativity to an exercise she undertook with her sister to keep them both busy: Ana Lua would write a new song each week, while Joana put together a video to go along with it. Locked in her bedroom due to the circumstances, Ana Lua unexpectedly found the identity of her solo project. She would build songs using rhythmic instruments (bass drum, *adufe*, *brinquinho*) inspired by Portuguese traditions from the Beira Alta, Madeira and Minho regions. Then she would add keyboards and her clever lyrics over melodies that boldly followed the heritage of Portugal's protest song movement of the 1970s.

Suddenly, it was all there, an enticing and mature musical language, as if Caiano, secluded in her bedroom, was born as a full-grown artist. Maybe because she is part of a generation that no longer thinks in terms of genre or categorisation, her music is a stunning combination of her greatest influences. "My parents love Portuguese singer-songwriters and traditional music, which I would listen to from a very early age, during our car trips," Caiano tells me. "On the other hand, there was a period when I was obsessed with Portishead, Björk, even Chico Buarque and Cesária Évora." And when you put all these pieces together, namely the traditional-inspired repertoire of Portugal's José Afonso, José Mário Branco and Fausto with the digital wizardry of trip-hop and electronica artists, you can easily find the outline for Caiano's electro-trad stylings.

Going from complete anonymity to one of the most praised and sought-after musicians in recent Portuguese music only took Caiano a couple of brilliant EPs: *Cheguei Tarde a Ontem* (2022) and *Se Dançar É Só Depois* (2023). Live on stage, she showcases her personal songwriting process, looping snippets of rhythms and vocals, adding keyboards and repetitive melodies, incrementally fashioning the accompaniment to her wonderfully expressive voice.

Now that she is finally releasing her debut album, *Vou Ficar Neste Quadrado* (I Shall Stay in this Square), Caiano is returning to that initial collection of songs written during the pandemic, reworking them with the benefits of hindsight and experience, her words accruing fresh layers of meaning. "I looked back on what I had done at the time and figured out how these songs could still make sense now," she says. So, even though she is still singing about a menacing 'bug' on the loose, the need to keep your distance, sticking to personal spaces and routines, rule-making and rule-breaking, it now allows for quite different meanings: psychological, political and social.

Working alone, Caiano maintains her creative ethic and integrity – twirling a spool of measuring tape around her head to supply a sound effect on 'Os Meus Sapatos Não Tocam nos Teus' or recording a rare Portuguese dialect for 'Bom, Vai Ficar Assim por Hoje' – building her songs with whatever is at hand. That can mean a mundane object laying on her workspace or drawing on the music she has carried with her since childhood. It is all part of the same artistic thinking: she is everything around her.

+ *Vou Ficar Neste Quadrado* *is reviewed on p58*

WIN

We have three copies of *Vou Ficar Neste Quadrado* to give away. To enter, answer: What was Caiano's first EP called?

See p21 for competition rules

Sunny in Budapest

'Wonders to hear' is how they describe Budapest Ritmo's festival of local and international sounds. ***Simon Broughton*** *picks some highlights*

Helmet at the ready: Daj Ognia at Budapest Ritmo

Budapest Ritmo (April 11-13) saw 25 artists performing over three days in the Hungarian capital, which was unbelievably sunny. The one disappointment was Mali's Salif Keita cancelling at the very last minute after feeling unwell, but others stepped up. Among the international guests were South Africa's BCUC, Turkey's Gaye Su Akyol, singer Gérald Toto from France and Estonia's ubiquitous Puuluup.

Of six showcase bands from around the region – Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Croatia – it was the two Polish bands that stood out: Hajda Banda and Daj Ognia. The latter, all dressed in black, are part of Poland's 'dark folk' movement. Singer Anna Sitko in a black headscarf starts by striking a metal helmet ritualistically between phrases. This is "music of the village that never was," she says. A lot of the music is drone based and the only melodic instruments are two bowed Swedish lyres and occasionally a hammered *santur* zither. Michał Biel, one of the two percussionists, looks like an Orthodox priest engaged in some ungodly ritual as he plays drums festooned with coloured ribbons and strings. In a dramatic moment towards the end, loud drums kick in and Sitko throws off her headscarf revealing a headdress of reindeer bones in her hair. Two young children crouching in the front row are captivated.

It was the Macedonian brass band Džambo Aguševi Orchestra who got Salif Keita's slot – ten of them, all in black, with an artillery of trumpets, baritones and a wraparound sousaphone. Aside from the punchy Balkan Gypsy brass, there was the much more mellow 'The Road to the East', a French song by Mathias Duplessy, but beautifully Balkanised.

Roma music is always a Ritmo ingredient and this year saw a first-time collaboration between Romano Drom, one of Hungary's leading Gypsy groups established 25 years ago, and Terne Čhave from the Czech Republic. As visitors, Terne Čhave took the stage first, led by Daniel Zeman on dextrous piano accordion. They're a seven-piece band with trumpet, sax, accordion, guitar, bass guitar, keyboard and drums, lyrics in Romani and quite a rock sound. They have played in Budapest a number of times.

After about 40 minutes, the five members of Romano Drom joined, with their very different acoustic guitar-led sound and front-man Antal Kovács. They also sing in Romani and the guitars and percussion brought a rootsy fizz to the sound. The combined set ended with one of Terne Čhave's most popular songs, appropriately named 'Budapest', written about a drunken night out in the city. The words say '*Budapest is a cool place / They got great palinka there…*' The audience, many of them singing along, were clearly in agreement.

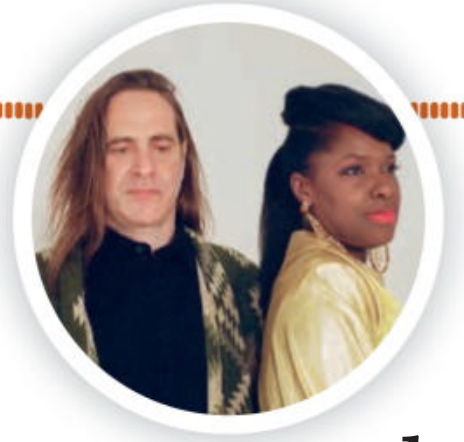
Simon Broughton

Farewell to Merve

In February, Anatolian psych-rockers Altın Gün announced that female vocalist Merve Daşdemir was leaving the group, with upcoming European shows in April and May to be her last with the band. So I did what any right-minded person would do, and took a train from Warsaw to see their gig in Berlin on April 18. It was their third night at Berlin's Huxleys Neue Welt, after gigs on the 16th and then the 17th sold out. Neue Welt is a large club, able to host up to 1,600 people, with almost a century of heritage. Their set began with two songs from debut album, *On*, Turkish evergreens 'Şeker Oğlan' and 'Tatlı Dile Güler Yüze'. Next up was brand new single 'Vallahi Yok', sung by Daşdemir along with the group's founder and bass player Jasper Verhulst. Out of the 18 songs they performed, particularly impressive were 'Yüce Dağ Başında', a hit from their *Yol* album, and the final track of the night, 'Caney', which smoothly switched in to 'Süpürgesi Yoncadan' from *Gece*, sung by the male vocalist and *bağlama* (Anatolian lute) player, Erdinç Ecevit Yıldız. Altin Gün are a collective on stage, so when the encore arrived it was a delight to hear the very danceable 'Çiçekler Ekiliyor' featuring solos by drummer Daniel Smienk, percussionist Chris Bruining and guitarist Thijs Elzinga. The wild 'Yali Yali' was the final track, with Daşdemir singing and dancing across the stage accompanied by just stroboscope lighting, creating a black-and-white psychedelic effect. Altın Gün have achieved a lot since their debut album came out in 2018, and this was a fine way to end what will hopefully just be the first chapter of their career. *MATEUSZ DOBROWOLSKI*

Altın Gün in Berlin

Kasia Dudziak



The 4 Corners and Centre of Ibibio Sound Machine's Universe

***Eno Williams** and **Max Grunhard**, the duo at the heart of London's Afro-electro powerhouse, plot a path from makossa and jùjú through jazz and post-punk to one of the world's most famous singers*

Manu Dibango
Makossa Man
(Atlantic, 1974)

My dad played Manu Dibango all the time and his music has a lot of great memories linked to it. I remember my mum and dad dancing, and me and my five sisters having a boogie to Manu when we were teenagers. We wanted to be like the Jacksons and formed a little singing group, although I ended up being the only one to carry it on. My dad told me about how he would go to see Manu in concert all the time. *Makossa Man* was recorded completely live. There wasn't as much of a DJ culture back then, so bands would play every night and that's why they were so skilled, I suppose. I was lucky enough to see him in France, a long time ago now, and was completely blown away by his performance. *ENO WILLIAMS*

THE CENTRE

Whitney Houston
Whitney Houston
(Arista, 1985)

It's not very *Songlines,* but I was in secondary school when the *Whitney Houston* album came out. It was the very first album I ever bought and the one that really got me into music – my first proper introduction to a female vocalist. I was in awe of her voice, her faith and her as a person. At school we had lights out – which meant when the lights went out, you went to bed. But I had a Walkman, so I used to sneakily listen to the album at night through my headphones. It has some killer tracks. When we went to class the next day, I'd say to all my friends "Oh my God you need to hear this Whitney Houston." Musically, the album gave me a better understanding of song structure and lyrics too. It really got me hooked. It was after that record that I started listening to everybody else and delved deeper into the music being created locally to me in West Africa. *ENO WILLIAMS*

INTERVIEW BY IZZY FELTON

Talking Heads
Remain in Light
(Sire, 1980)

This is my choice because it's a really amazing album and a bit of a reference point with [Ibibio Sound Machine]. I found it interesting that [Talking Heads] were really into African sounds and listened to Fela Kuti, so *Remain in Light* has a lot of cultural crossovers. It was a massive pop album, but when you listen to it a bit more closely, you realise there's a lot of interesting things going on. That's what we're like as a band, and the fact that it was one of the first albums that was done in that way means it's an inspiring reference point for us. It shows that music unifies us, regardless of what territory, region or culture you might be from. *MAX GRUNHARD*

King Sunny Adé & His African Beats
Synchro System
(Island Records / Mango, 1983)

Sunny Adé is from the whole Afrobeat/Fela time. But his music was the flip side of Afrobeat: much more like *jùjú* music, with more traditional instrumentation and percussion. The grooves and the drums drive the whole record. We used to listen to it a lot – my mum really enjoyed listening to jùjú music and on Friday nights, after the markets shut, there were street parties and [jùjú] was the type of music all the bands would play. A lot of the local musicians were influenced by Sunny Adé. I think *Synchro System* earned him a Grammy nomination as well... For an African to be on that kind of playing field at that time, it was inspiring. *ENO WILLIAMS*

Yusef Lateef
Eastern Sounds
(Fontana, 1961)

We have some big sing-y records on this list of favourite albums, but I studied jazz when I was learning music. The 1960s was pretty much as good as it got when it comes to jazz stuff, and Yusef Lateef's *Eastern Sounds* is one of my favourite records. I loved that he was this legendary jazz guy from the States that was also very much influenced by Middle Eastern music, hence the album's name. There's a lot going on here; he plays a variety of flutes and there's this heavy referencing to a lot of Middle Eastern culture. It's another interesting record because of that cross-fertilisation of culture and music from different parts of the world. *MAX GRUNHARD*

+ *Ibibio Sound Machine's* *latest album Pull the Rope is reviewed on p70*

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Holy Cowley

With Cowley Road Carnival returning for the first time in five years, ***Fred Waine*** *takes a trip to Oxford's melting pot*

It's carnival day. The procession is in full flow: there are marching bands of schoolchildren, West Papuans in tribal dress, Nepalese carrying *madal* drums, bright seas of West African *kente* cloth and samba dancers spinning in feather headdresses and dazzling tasselled skirts. Later, as locals groove to the off-beats of reggae sounds and swig from cans of Red Stripe, ganja and shisha smoke become confused in a haze made golden by the late afternoon sun.

While these could be images of Rio or Kingston, we're instead on Cowley Road, in Oxford, England. Since its conception in 1986 by members of the city's Caribbean community, Cowley Road Carnival has fulfilled an important local function, as a celebration of a cultural diversity historically overshadowed by Oxford's elitist uniformity. For local historian James Attlee, it's a window into '*the other Oxford, the one never written about,*' whose residents, many of them first- and second-generation immigrants, engender a sense of place and activity far removed (in manner, if not in distance) from the city's oppressive, unshakeable university centre. Carnival hasn't taken place since before the COVID-19 pandemic, but all the signs are that '*this uniquely colourful and vibrant community event will be back on the streets*' in July 2024.

If, as for Attlee, Cowley Road's inhabitants '*have brought with them [...] their beliefs, their values, their trades, their prejudices, the stories of their past and their hopes for the future*,' they have also inarguably brought their musical talents and tastes. Besides carnival, one of Oxford's most well-established live events is Bossaphonik, a monthly 'jazz world' club night held in the Cowley Workers Social Club, which, since its creation in 2004, by DJs Dan Ofer and Gil Karpas has hosted international crossover acts ranging from Serbian-Roma jazz duo Faith i Branko to Cubafrobeat, the collaboration between world fusion collective Lokkhi Terra and former Fela Kuti bandmember Dele Sosimi.

One artist who is a direct product of Oxford's cultural and musical melting pot is Zahra Haji Fath Ali Tehrani, who runs the Young Women's Music Project (YWMP), a community group whose music workshops provide a safe space for young women, trans and non-binary people. In December, Tehrani toured the UK with a band made up of YWMP members who had attended a short series of drumming classes, debuting material from her recent *For You* EP, on which she builds simple, repetitive songs through vocal loops and percussion such as the steelpan, Irish *bodhrán* and Persian *daf*.

This sonic palette mirrors Tehrani's ethnic background, as the child of an Irish mother and Iranian father. Tehrani grew up going to music workshops where she, like many of the young people who now attend sessions with YWMP, found a sense of belonging that was often denied to her elsewhere in Oxford, as a second-generation immigrant from a working-class family. This experience has greatly informed her inclusive approach to community work: go to one of YWMP's showcases (such as the all-day bill of novice DJs put on at a local cinema in June) and you'll see artists from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and gender identities, which are less likely to be represented elsewhere. Again, Oxford's juxtapositions of wealth and poverty, cultural multiplicity and conservatism are exposed; again, these contrasts are transcended through music.

Integral to Oxford's grassroots music scene are the Cowley Road area's many independent music/arts hotspots (the Library and Star pubs, the Ultimate Picture Palace cinema, and the Truck record store), which form an alliance that champions local underground artists. The promoter Divine Schism puts on DIY gigs all over town, giving smaller acts the chance to appear on bills alongside more established names and to perform at regular all-day community fundraising events at spaces such as the Common Ground cafe and the Florence Park Community Centre. The solidarity that runs through Oxford's music community is lauded by Divine Schism founder Aiden Canaday: "You need venues to be on board and open to ideas so the people who work at venues around the city are really important. It's good to be brave and just ask if you've got an idea about something you'd like to do!"

Both as stalwarts of the local music community and artists in their own right, Canaday (who makes folk music in the tradition of his Welsh heritage) and Tehrani are just two of the many individuals to have experienced the benefits of a scene which recognises that it is greater than the sum of its parts. This colourful, supportive spirit will sustain Oxford's subculture for years to come.

***+ Cowley Road Carnival** returns on July 7*

WIN

To win these 25 releases, answer: which two musicians connect Nickel Creek and Watkins Family Hour?

See p21 for competition rules

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We have another prize bundle from the good folks at Thirty Tigers to celebrate our 25th anniversary. This huge bundle includes 25 releases from the esteemed label, including albums from Bruce Hornsby, Charley Crockett, Cimafunk, Nickel Creek, Watchhouse and Watkins Family Hour. Full list is at songlines.co.uk/competitions.

TAKE NOTE

Sarāb

Megan Iacobini de Fazio meets the France-based collective uniting Middle Eastern traditions with contemporary jazz, climate activism and intense live shows

In Arabic, *Sarāb* means 'mirage' – a fitting name for a group that has been hard to pin down since coming together in 2018. Born out of a chance meeting between Franco-Syrian singer Climène Zarkan and French guitarist Baptiste Ferrandis, the band has grown into a six-piece collective, their sound branching out in a multitude of directions. Keeping their hearts and ears open to the world around them, Sarāb draw on rock, contemporary jazz and traditional Arabic music to build a feverish, sometimes hallucinogenic, frenzy of rhythms and melodies, propelled by their endless curiosity and deep commitment to social justice.

Zarkan was raised between Damascus and France and is the daughter of renowned Syrian composer and *oud* player Bachar Zarkan. Though she grew up immersed in traditional Arab music, she initially played the piano and trained as a classical musician. "I only began singing when I was 22 or 23, so it took a long time for me to come back to this part of my life."

It was Zarkan who introduced Ferrandis to Arabic music through her father's songs. "My background is in rock and hard rock, so it was something totally strange and new," he recalls. "I am still discovering and learning, which I will be doing for all my life. I try to be humble and find new treasures in this culture, trying to understand it through my Western brain."

They began as a duo, rearranging traditional Arabic songs, but realised soon enough that their vision called for a bigger, more kaleidoscopic sound. They assembled their band and "it worked right away," recalls Ferrandis.

Their self-titled 2019 debut includes several reinterpretations of traditional songs, many of which are about love, except the hauntingly beautiful 'Tiri', about Palestinian freedom. By the time their second album *Arwāh Hurra – Âmes Libres* was released in 2021, Sarāb were working as a true collective, with each musician contributing their own perspective. "Climène and I usually have a vision of what we want to do, but then we bring in everyone else's ideas, because we really respect their ways of thinking. So, even if we arrive somewhere completely different, it's perfect because we got there together," says Ferrandis. "We try to find harmony and balance in the songs, and between us as human beings."

This harmony is apparent on their latest release, *Qawalebese Tape* (2023), which honours the Egyptian and Syrian repertoires it draws on, while providing each musician ample freedom of expression. 'Zourouni' pays tribute to Egyptian composer Sayed Darwish, starting with Zarkan's tender vocals floating over a sunlit soundscape, accompanied by languid trombone and dreamlike textures, before exploding into a joyous whirlwind of psychedelic keys and percussion.

With each new release Sarāb have become more secure, not only in their sound but in what they want to transmit to the world. "It's important for us that our music has a message. I'm a woman and Arab, so my life is naturally political," says Zarkan. On 'Samt' she draws from a poem by Syrian writer Maram al-Masri (whose words are borrowed for many songs on the album) to talk about exile and the bittersweet memories of home, while Ferrandis, inspired by the writing of James C Scott, examines the oppression inherent in our industrial society on the rousing 'Queen Rast'.

Sarāb have frequently addressed the climate crisis in their music, and in May they will be taking part in a pilot for a new model of sustainable touring funded by the European Jazz Network's Green Pilot Tour Fund, travelling by train between concerts in the Netherlands and the UK to minimise the ecological impact on the planet.

For the band, playing live is always an opportunity to champion the causes closest to their heart: "We wrote a new song about what is going on in Palestine," says Zarkan, "and we talk about this at every concert. It starts from an old Palestinian resistance song that was written after British colonisation, and then moves on to calls for ceasefire and a free Palestine. Because it's important to be precise: this is what we are asking for."

+ Sarāb *play Manchester Jazz Festival (May 25), The Glasshouse, Gateshead (May 26), Ronnie Scott's, London (May 27) and Howard Assembly Rooms, Leeds (May 28)*

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SPOTLIGHT

Sara Curruchich

The Guatemalan singer-songwriter tells ***Catalina Maria Johnson*** about her determination to represent women and carry the knowledge of her Indigenous heritage through music. “It’s a revolutionary act,” she confides

Sara Curruchich may well be the first woman to stand on international stages singing contemporary songs in Mayan Kaqchikel. When her voice soars, the syllables of her language ripple through the air, bestowing blessings of mystery and goodwill.

Curruchich was born in San Juan Comalapa, within a Mayan Kaqchikel community in Guatemala’s central highlands. Her people are renowned for ancestral traditions of art, weaving and knowledge, as well as a history of courageous resistance during Guatemala’s 36-year civil war.

During her recent *Mujer Indígena* tour through the US, Curruchich and I chat over Zoom. An eloquent, insightful conversant, she is passionate in expressing how her music emerges both from her people’s collective memories, as well as her own perspective as an artist and an Indigenous woman.

Curruchich began to sing as a child as a way of gaining courage. The unstable electricity in her home kept spaces darkened; singing helped her overcome her fear of entering into the darkness. The desire to sing is one of her first memories – she remembers wanting to take religious song classes at about seven years of age, but her father refused to give her permission because she was too young.

Nevertheless, community radio resounded in Comalapa, and that was how Curruchich heard the marimba (Guatemala’s national instrument) for the first time. Without ever having seen such an instrument at the time, she loved it, and exclaims, “There was something in those rhythms and melodies that invited your body to dance!”

Another key musical milestone came about when she was about ten and her brother

shared a cassette with her that had songs by Nicaragua's Dúo Guardabarranco and Cuba's Silvio Rodríguez – musicians within the *nueva trova* protest music movement. Curruchich laughs as she reminisces about how she used a pencil to twirl the tape back in the spool so she could listen to certain songs over and over again.

Shortly thereafter, a song in Kaqchikel by her cousin gained fame in the area and, for Curruchich, it was a revelation — hearing that love song incorporating the viewpoint of the Mayan cosmovision, Curruchich deduced singing could be a way to combat rejection of Indigenous world views.

All of these early experiences would come into play in her own songs – from gaining courage and illuminating darkness through music, to incorporating the danceable rhythms of the marimba, to purposefully incorporating the Mayan cosmovision to overcome racism and misogyny.

Her earliest compositions were very private, explains Curruchich, and primarily a channel to heal the pain she suffered because of discrimination: "It was such a blow to feel that I would have to reject and deny my identity as an Indigenous woman to be accepted in certain groups and spaces. I began composing to become stronger and recover and find my roots, embrace what I am, my Mayan being, my Kaqchikel being. And I wanted to share this feeling with other women and girls who were living a similar situation."

Today, Curruchich is a lauded, recognised star of her community who has toured and sung in Kaqchikel and Spanish on stages around the world. Her debut album *Somos* (2019), as well as 2021's *Mujer Indígena*, clamour for dignity and respect for Indigenous women worldwide while sharing hopes for a different kind of future.

She generally performs in one of two formats. One is intimate, accompanied by Luis Juárez Quixtán, a virtuosic K'iche' Mayan guitar player and conservatory professor from Guatemala who is based in Paris. She calls it "a spiritual musical experience, a dance between the guitar and the voice."

In the other configuration, Curruchich surrounds herself with a crack team of female musicians, deploying her velvety, potent voice upon lush tides of marimba chords and rocked-out guitar riffs. These serious dance grooves are created by drummer Moty, bass player Karla Molkovic and marimba player Sandra Moreno from Chiapas, Mexico.

In both settings, Curruchich declares an intention to reaffirm the deep emotional connection that music creates as a potent reminder of our shared humanity. At the same time, she wants to amplify the participation of women in the music industry and considers the band's performance an affirmation of equality, noting that when they perform in festivals, there are normally less than 50% of women in the line-ups.

"It's a revolutionary act," she proclaims. "We defy stereotypes and claim our space on stages." Indeed, Curruchich has often created controversy in her homeland for being a Mayan Kaqchikel artist who presents a contemporary persona, as well as for her forthright expression of critical political sentiments. At one point, she cut her waist-long hair somewhat shorter, and in a style with a half-shaved side; at another point she also had her nose pierced – both forms of adornment created unpleasant misogynistic debates on social media.

"It was such a level of aggression," she observes, "and it seems awfully sad to have had to explain that we [as women] own our own bodies and are able to make decisions about them. We have to continue fighting against all of this and continue to accompany and support each other from the perspective of love."

"I began composing to become stronger and recover and find my roots, embrace what I am, my Mayan being, my Kaqchikel being"

Curruchich performing at Foro Cultural Hilvana, Mexico City in February 2024

Yet Curruchich also confesses that she is still in the process of recovering her cultural legacy, as Mayan cosmogonic practices have been demonised by conservative religious institutions in her homeland: "I am 30 years old, but I'm still learning. I wasn't even part of a Mayan ceremony until 2012! Now, it's a part of me – a way to approach life and existence, and spiritually and lovingly tie us to the life of other beings and animals. Even if I don't always express this in an explicit way, it's part of what I do and a part of the sensibility that Indigenous peoples have had, so it's also a way of loving our ancestrality."

This continued learning and healing has taken Curruchich to participate in collective endeavours such as performing at the first standalone International Indigenous Music Summit in Toronto in 2023. She describes it as a healing experience, a space of convergence for Indigenous musicians, that planted "seeds now germinating into a beautifully transgressive musical vision." She describes the summit as a beautiful and safe space, where she found a human family which reminded her of trees – often growing at great distances from each other, but connected underground by intertwining roots.

The International Indigenous Music Summit, Curruchich contemplates, also challenged colonist frameworks that reject Indigenous music for not fitting within established Western music parameters. As she wryly observes, "They constantly try to nullify our venerable structures because of the perspective that, 'this time can't be counted, that tempo can't be measured.' That all reflects a Western vision that always tries to box us into its own ideas of time and timing. Right?"

And therein resides the immense power of Curruchich's music, as it artfully shares another way of being. She uses '*k'u'xlab'äl*', a word from her own beautiful language, to manifest what is expressed through her songs: "K'u'xlab'äl signifies what is woven in your heart, in other words, memory. It's the memory of your body and other memories, but includes the sense of not just individual but collective memory. Our memory has been erased in so many ways. So, to name our memories is an act of rebellion." ◆

Sara Curruchich / Xeloj; Anubhav Jain

SIMON SAYS…

Simon Broughton on the power of the *tanbur* in Iranian Kurdistan and Ali Akbar Moradi's upcoming London performance

Ali Akbar Moradi

Over 20 years ago, when I first went to Iran, one of the musicians I most enjoyed meeting was Kurdish *tanbur* player Ali Akbar Moradi. He had recorded a beautiful album with Kayhan Kalhor called *In the Mirror of the Sky* (see *Songlines* #26). In Kurdistan, there's a religious minority called Yarsan or Ahl-e Haqq (People of the Truth), rather like the Alevis in Turkey, and marginalised by the Shias and Sunnis around them. Both the Alevis and Yarsan hold the tanbur – a long-necked lute – sacred and use it in their religious gatherings led by a tanbur-playing *darvish*. "The tanbur is one of the oldest of string instruments," says Moradi. "It's been present here in the region for up to 5,000 years."

The Ahl-e Haqq are like Kurdish Sufis, they have absorbed elements of Islam, but they don't pray five times a day, they don't fast for Ramadan and women aren't required to cover up and are free to play music in their ceremonies. There's also no prohibition on alcohol.

Ali Akbar Moradi knows, and recorded for the French label Inedit, the 72 sacred *maqams* (modes) used by the Yarsan in their secretive ceremonies. It was only about 60 years ago that this music was played to outsiders; and Moradi had to get special permission from the regional authorities to record them. Moradi started playing tanbur aged six and was taught by local darvish players who'd give him a lesson when they travelled through the village. During my visit, he took me to a cemetery where Sayyed Vali Hosseini is buried who he describes as "the best tanbur player ever."

Moradi's tanbur, made from mulberry wood, has three strings and brings both a melodic and rhythmic ingredient to the music. The sound of the fingers on the strings adds the rhythmic pulse. There's a power and intensity about this music that makes it quite exceptional. For years Moradi planned Khane Tanbur (House of Tanbur), a cultural centre, in his home village of Guran, but it couldn't really operate during the hardline presidency of the Ahmadinejad years. It eventually opened in 2016 with several prominent Iranian Kurdish musicians including Kayhan Kalhor, Shahram Nazeri and Hossein Alizadeh performing. It's used for traditional music, carpet-making and other traditions.

The reason for writing this is that Ali Akbar Moradi is soon playing in London for the first time in almost 20 years with two of his sons, Koroush and Arash Moradi, also tanbur players and *kamancheh* (spike fiddle)-player Mehdi Bagheri. Arash Moradi has been playing since he was a child. "I might have been one or two years when I began playing," he chuckles, "it was just always there so I can't remember when I started." It's a rare opportunity to hear music that is incredibly beautiful and little known. Arash Moradi says they will be playing spiritual songs from Yarsan poets as well as Kurdish folk material. "This is a musical tradition that's been around for centuries and my father has had the most important role in keeping it alive – first for Iranian audiences and then in Europe and America." ◆

+ *The Ali Akbar Moradi Ensemble* will play at Kings Place, London, on June 1

Simon Broughton

Next Issue…

July 2024 (#199)
On sale June 14

It's an Africa special with Malian legend **Salif Keita**, prolific Cameroonian musician **Franck Biyong**, who has recorded the album of his career, joyous Tanzanian rhythms and singing from **The Zawose Queens**, powerful Senegalese duo **Def Mama Def**, Nigerian '*Pan African Rockstar*' **Lady Donli** and South African a capella stars-in-the-making **The Joy**.

There will also be Swiss-Ecuadorian guitar brothers **Hermanos Gutiérrez**, Indian singer **Raghu Dixit**, Italian street musicians **Ars Nova Napoli**, Scotland's latest folk supergroup **Birdvox**, Serbian singer and cultural activist **Svetlana Spajić** and we tell the story of how India's **Asha Puthli** became the voice of US free jazz and Italian disco in the 70s.

The Joy

FEEDBACK

Letters, shout-outs, comments, emails and everything in between

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RIP Zakaria Ibrahim

[*In response to last issue's obituary for Zakaria Ibrahim (1952-2024)*]
I too was sad when I heard of the death of Zakaria Ibrahim, founder of Egyptian band El Tanbura and of the El Mastaba Centre for Egyptian Folk Lore in Cairo. The arts charity Cultural Co-operation [now Culture&], with whom I worked, were the first to bring the group to the UK in 2002 for the Diaspora Music Village Festival and I have such fond memories of the group then, including a memorable concert at Union Chapel. I next encountered them in Zanzibar at the Sauti za Busara festival as they were staying in the same hotel as the Yemeni group I had brought and we stayed up until three in the morning on the hotel roof listening to the sound of the *simsimiyya*, the lyre-like instrument whose sound Ibrahim had worked so hard to preserve. He was such a courteous and knowledgeable man, much loved by all who worked with him.

Zakaria Ibrahim (photo by Simon Broughton)

As a result of the [Music Village Festival]'s artistic director, Prakash Daswani's, visit to Egypt we also twice brought over the Sufi singer Sheikh Yasin Al-Tuhami to play in the festival and it would be good if *Songlines* could do a retrospective on Music Village as one of the longest running world music festivals and free to boot, starting in 1987 and [only ending] in 2014.
Paul Hughes-Smith, Chiswick

Messages of Hope

I listened to Souad Massi's 'L'Espoir' [from the album *Sequana*] for the first time this evening. It came at the right time. The world does seem to be in a state. *Songlines* not only promotes peaceful collaboration through music, but also offers a positive message of cultural integration, better understanding and respect for each other and the upholding of Indigenous values and rights, often linked to a more enriching relationship with nature and this planet. In other words, hope. Thank you.
Graham Duff, Bedfordshire

A Lame Excuse

Well done in calling out the decision of the director of WOMADelaide on the decision to cancel the appearance of Palestinian group 47SOUL on the basis that they could not '*be presented safely*.' A lame excuse if ever I heard one. The editor's comments were spot on, as are the comments of 47SOUL who said it was an example that '*feeds the narrative of Palestinians being an inherent source of danger to others*.' WOMADelaide [said] that they were unsure if 47SOUL could be a '*cohesive part of the discussions on the unfolding situation in the Middle East*' when the event took place in early March, when the bombing and genocide in Gaza was escalating into an all-out war designed to destroy the economy and infrastructure of Gaza and no doubt to also destroy Palestinian culture including that of young musicians in Gaza. Good you are running the download to replace the covermount CD for those who don't have an annual sub. A brave and worthwhile editorial.
Tony Burke. Bedford

AT SHORT NOTICE

Huge congratulations for tonight, what a GREAT [25th anniversary] SHOW!! You and the team @songlinesmagazine did vey well.
From: sandilegontsana

Cheers to @songlinesmagazine on your 25th anniversary[.] So glad you chose to start your celebrations with @leventdunordquebec @sirimosevdah and @balimayaproject
From: @n_rinder

It's been an evening listening to @DeleSosimi – who played @PepperyMusic #Ipswich a few years back, the late #TonyAllen and SOUTY by @MathlouthiEmel – @SonglinesMag
From: @julian_gibbs

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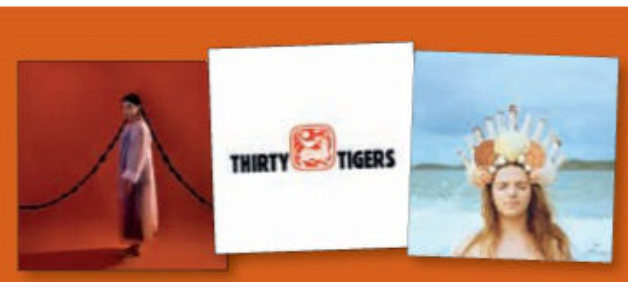


COMPETITIONS Submit your entry for each competition via the website: **songlines.co.uk/competitions**. Winners will be chosen at random. Only one entry per household. No cash alternatives. If you would prefer not to be sent details of other *Songlines* products and services, or products from other carefully selected companies, please tick the relevant box on the entry form. Closing date for this issue's competitions (unless otherwise stated): June 28 2024

Maurice El Médioni
(1928-2024)
Algeria's boogie-woogie maestro

Courtesy of Maurice El Médion

Maurice El Médioni was a shape-shifting irrepressible force. A sharply dressed streetwise teenager who learned boogie-woogie and mambo bass lines from the US GIs who came to liberate Oran and Algeria from the threat of Nazi forces in WWII; a piano player who played '*mambo in an Andalous style*'; one of a group of Muslim and Jewish musicians including El Anka, Lili Boniche and Lili Labassi who, in the late 1940s and 50s, forged a new Maghrebi music in North Africa. An exile who fled the Algerian War of Independence, eventually to Paris, where exiled Algerians flocked to see artists from their country on the cabaret circuit.

But it was the Piranha label's *Cafè Oran* album (1996) that opened the doors and kicked off the truly international career of this charming, innately hip, compulsive musician, then in his 70s but still hungry for new musical adventures. One of the triumphs of his years of appearing in concert halls across the world was his 2006 release on Piranha, *Descarga Oriental*. The next year, Maurice and his collaborator, New York-based Cuban percussionist and bandleader Roberto Rodriguez, deservedly received the Culture Crossing award at the BBC Radio 3 World Music Awards.

In 2007 there was also a glimpse of the golden age of 50s Algerian *chaabi* music when the El Gusto orchestra – reformed for a chaabi documentary – toured Europe. At their soundcheck in Marseille, when Maurice began to solo, the entire Algerian percussion section, average age probably around 30, stood up and filmed him on their phones. The exile remained a legend in his homeland, 55 years after his departure!

In 2011, at age 83, he moved from Marseille to live close to his children in Israel, to cope with the slings and arrows that advancing years deliver. In his first few years there, he played concerts in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv with the Mediterranean-Andalusian Orchestra Ashkelon led by Tom Cohen.

Ben Mandelson, producer of Maurice's recordings for Piranha, has written of how El Médioni's stylings have opened the ears and hands of younger pianists. His PianOriental school lives on in musicians like Nikki Yeo, Faraj Suleiman, Darya Mosenzon and, who knows, in the hands of future generations yet to take to the piano. Long may his music be around, along with the memory of a genial, joyous spirit who achieved so much, despite the disadvantages and dangers with which he was confronted. *MAX REINHARDT*

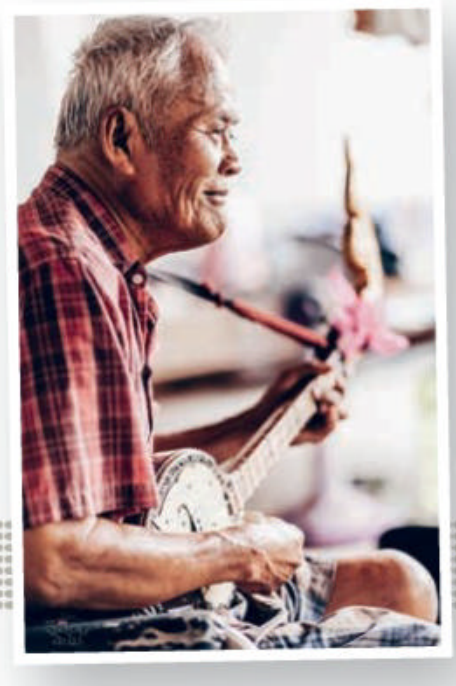
Thongsai Thapthanon (1947-2024)
Phin master and pioneer of Isan popular music

Musicians gathered late last month in Roi Et province for the funeral of master *phin* player Thongsai Thapthanon, who passed away on March 20, aged 77. Thongsai began playing the two-three stringed Isan (northeast Thai/Lao) lute at the age of four and was a key member of the pioneering Petch Phin Thong band, which, under the leadership of Noppadon Duangporn (1941-2019), developed Isan popular music, especially *luk thung* Isan (northeastern-style country music).

Thongsai and Noppadon added an electric pickup to Thongsai's two-stringed phin, which used metal bicycle wires for strings, enabling it to accompany singers or take the lead. They brought the phin to the front of stage, cementing its position as one of the 'trinity' of *molam* instruments, along with the iconic *khaen* (bamboo mouth organ) and the *sor* (fiddle).

Thongsai joined Noppadon's band in 1970 using the nickname Thongsai Hua Nak, which was derived from the famous *naga* (serpent) head of his instrument. A year later, Thongsai led a molam troupe to perform in front of a Buddha statue at Ubonrat Dam and later presented a 'golden' phin to HM King Rama 9 at the graduation ceremony at Khon Kaen University, who said the instrument was the 'crown jewel' of Isan's musical instruments.

The rise in popularity of the phin over the past 25 years is testament to Thongsai's energy and enthusiasm for molam music. He wrote many compositions and tunes that highlighted the phin's versatility and he mentored many of today's top phin players (Bangkok Paradise International Molam Band's phin player, Khammao, was a student); his home was always open for visitors. Thongsai won many awards during his 60-year career, including Outstanding Artist (Isan music) by the Office of the National Culture Commission in 2000, although he never received the kind of official support he deserved. *JOHN CLEWLEY*



Jason Lamai

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Hey MINISTER

Margareth Menezes, an icon of Afro-Brazilian music and Salvador's carnival, talks to ***Oleno Netto*** about her European tour and her plans as Brazil's new Minister of Culture

When Lula da Silva became president of Brazil in January 2023 for the third time, one of the first things he announced was the re-establishment of the country's Ministry of Culture – disbanded by his predecessor Jair Bolsonaro in 2019. Lula has form in choosing a popular Minister of Culture – he appointed Gilberto Gil in a previous term – and this time was no different, with the beloved Bahian singer Margareth Menezes being given the role. "It's in my nature to get involved and experiment [with different things], even in my albums," Menezes tells me. "It's just how my mind works, and I think that is natural for an artist who experiences transformation through art."

Menezes' career erupted four decades ago when she released her first single in 1987 with Djalma Oliveira, 'Faraó (Divindade do Egito)', a song which would become a staple of Salvador's buzzing samba-reggae carnival. Her first album, simply titled *Margareth Menezes*, came out the following year and featured the song 'Uma História de Ifa (Elegibó)'. It was this song that led David Byrne to hire Menezes to open the tour of his 1989 Latin-infused solo album, *Rei Momo*. "It was the first samba-reggae played outside of Brazil. I was the first artist to bring this rhythm from [the State of] Bahia, this language that comes from the Afro *blocos* [carnival groups], which mixed African *clave* rhythms with the contemporary music of that moment – a bit of *tropicália*, a bit of Latin rhythm – with a very powerful impact." She was then signed internationally by Polydor and Mango Records who released her music in Europe and the US and Japan, respectively. Over the years, she would be involved in over 20 international tours.

During one of her concerts abroad she came up with the idea of '*Afropopbrasileiro*', a name inspired by a newspaper headline which read '*Margareth Menezes arrives with her Brazilian African Pop*.' "I was the first artist to defend this musical identity as a concept. It was very difficult for me [in Brazil, as] a Black woman doing Afro-urban music, [which was] little explored and recognised, with a completely different singing style and with the Bahian accent. The market was very unfair to my generation of Black artists from Bahia at that moment." The different opportunities offered to white and Black artists at the time left Menezes without a contract with a major record company from the mid-90s onwards, leading her to create her own record label in 2001, Estrela do Mar. This entrepreneurial move took the singer-composer to a new level of popularity in her home country when she released the album *Afropopbrasileiro* that year, which included the song 'Dandalunda', written by Carlinhos Brown.

When the song started playing on the radio, Universal Music established a partnership with her label to release the album. "The song played for two years consecutively. In the first year, it was the third most-played song at carnival, and in the following year, it won first place – it was the first time this happened with a song from Bahia. And this completely reopened the market for me." From then on she started doing projects with her own label or in partnership with majors – the latest ones being the live album *Para Gil & Caetano* (2015), with songs from both Gil and Veloso, and the studio album *Autêntica* (2019), which marks her return to Afropop. "I learned everything as I went along. It wasn't easy for me to build my career at any point, but it was worthwhile because I managed to [do it] with substance, with a concept. And that within the commercial music market is not so easy."

Those early years were truly incredible for Menezes; during that time, she also composed and recorded the hit 'Passe em Casa' with Tribalistas – a supergroup formed by Carlinhos Brown, Marisa Monte and Arnaldo Antunes. Menezes recalls spending an entire day in 2001 in their company, "towards the end of this meeting, I had the guitar in my hand and the melody [of the song] came to me. They wrote the lyrics at such a fast

Below: Menezes at the Women's Music Event Awards in 2022

pace that there wasn't time for me to add anything to it. Their connection is fantastic, it's like they have one mind." A few months later she was invited to go to Rio without being told that they'd be recording the song. Six months later she received the news that it would be on the *Tribalistas* (2002) album, which turned out to be one of the biggest-selling albums ever released in Brazil. "This experience was fantastic, because it encouraged me to start sharing more of my compositions [with other artists], strengthening this side of being a songwriter."

It didn't take long before Menezes also began acting as a social entrepreneur, founding Fábrica Cultural [Cultural Factory] in 2004, a non-governmental organization that carries out social and cultural actions in disadvantaged areas of Salvador, the capital of Bahia. She directed the NGO until becoming Minister of Culture. "We were able to create a new identity for the crafts of Bahia, improving the production. It generates employment, especially for women – [including] Black and Indigenous women, who were waiting for an opportunity."

> "The market was very unfair to my generation of Black artists from Bahia"

Menezes agrees when asked that this initiative played a role in her becoming the current Minister of Culture. She adds: “the fact that I am a seasoned artist who communicates with other [music] styles, [helps me] understand what the sector needs in a certain way – I have a real connection with it. Also, having done many international tours, I understand how Brazil is known internationally. I understand that Brazil has a very large cultural diversity, and I understand the attention that the cultural and artistic productions of each region need.”

Gilberto Gil had been Minister of Culture from 2003 to 2008, through the first and some of Lula’s second term as President. Menezes says she had the opportunity to talk to Gil about taking on the position right at the beginning. “I always listen to him when I can. In fact, I’m here in Rio de Janeiro [where the interview was carried out over a WhatsApp call] today because it is the induction of [environmentalist, philosopher and poet] Ailton Krenak [at the Brazilian Academy of Letters], and I’m going to meet with Gil. He called me on Sunday asking if I would come.”

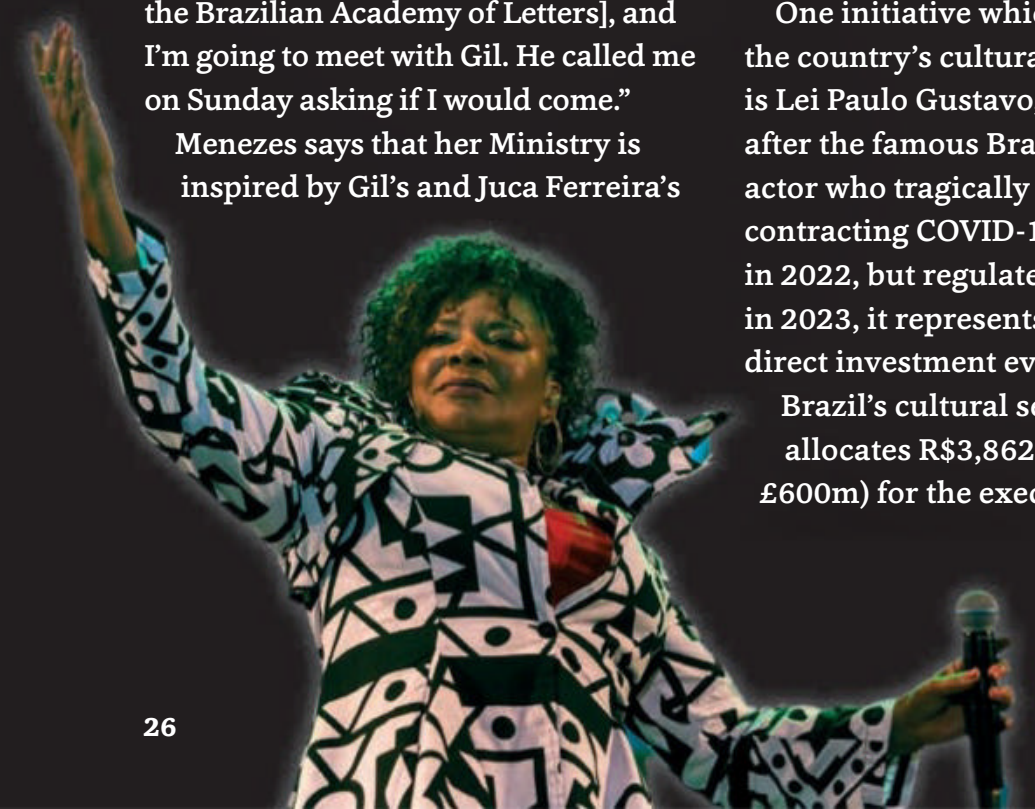
Menezes says that her Ministry is inspired by Gil’s and Juca Ferreira’s – who also held the position of Minister of Culture under Lula, as well as during Dilma Rousseff’s second term until her impeachment. “We have rebuilt some initiatives, like Cultura Viva [Living Culture] and Pontos de Cultura [Culture Points]. We are seeking to listen to people with experience and bring new generations into the Ministry – a young crowd that is assisting and bringing fresh ideas.”

Menezes and her team have the task of rebuilding the Ministry of Culture after it had been dissolved and replaced by the Special Secretariat of Culture, which was part of the Ministry of Tourism, during the government of Jair Bolsonaro, from 2019 to 2022. “It was very painful for us to be without [this] Ministry, to go through the pandemic without it. [It is] a huge sector [and] there were no public policies for us. It was very difficult for us to swallow those four years of persecution [and] dismantling, but now we are in a different moment.”

One initiative which exemplifies the country’s cultural redevelopment is Lei Paulo Gustavo, a law named after the famous Brazilian comedy actor who tragically passed away after contracting COVID-19. Established in 2022, but regulated and adjusted in 2023, it represents the largest direct investment ever made in Brazil’s cultural sector. The law allocates R$3,862 billion (close to £600m) for the execution of cultural actions and projects throughout the national territory. Menezes’ Ministry is responsible for Programa Rouanet nas Favelas, a pilot project that will invest R$5 million with the aim of nationalising resources that historically have been concentrated in the cities of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The programme will support cultural managers from the *favelas* to serve their populations in the capitals of five Brazilian states: Bahia, Ceará, Maranhão, Pará and Goiás.

When asked what the Brazil that she has been helping to build over the many years of her artistic career, and that she hopes to help build with her work as Minister of Culture, looks like, Menezes concludes: “this true Brazil where everyone is included. There is no ‘rest of Brazil’ – it is one Brazil. A country with human diversity and diverse realities. We have reparations that need to be made regarding Indigenous peoples and the issue of slavery, which lasted 388 years here. From this place [I now occupy] and seizing this opportunity, the desire I have is that at some point people can take advantage of the wealth we have. That we can look at ourselves and accept us as we are.” ◆

***+ Margareth Menezes** is performing at the Barbican Centre, London on July 26 as part of a double-bill with Ilê Aiyê celebrating Afro-Brazilian music and carnival. She will also be performing throughout Europe during the summer*



Above and below: Menezes at 2022’s Afropunk Bahia

Andre Fofano; José de Holanda; Mariana Smania

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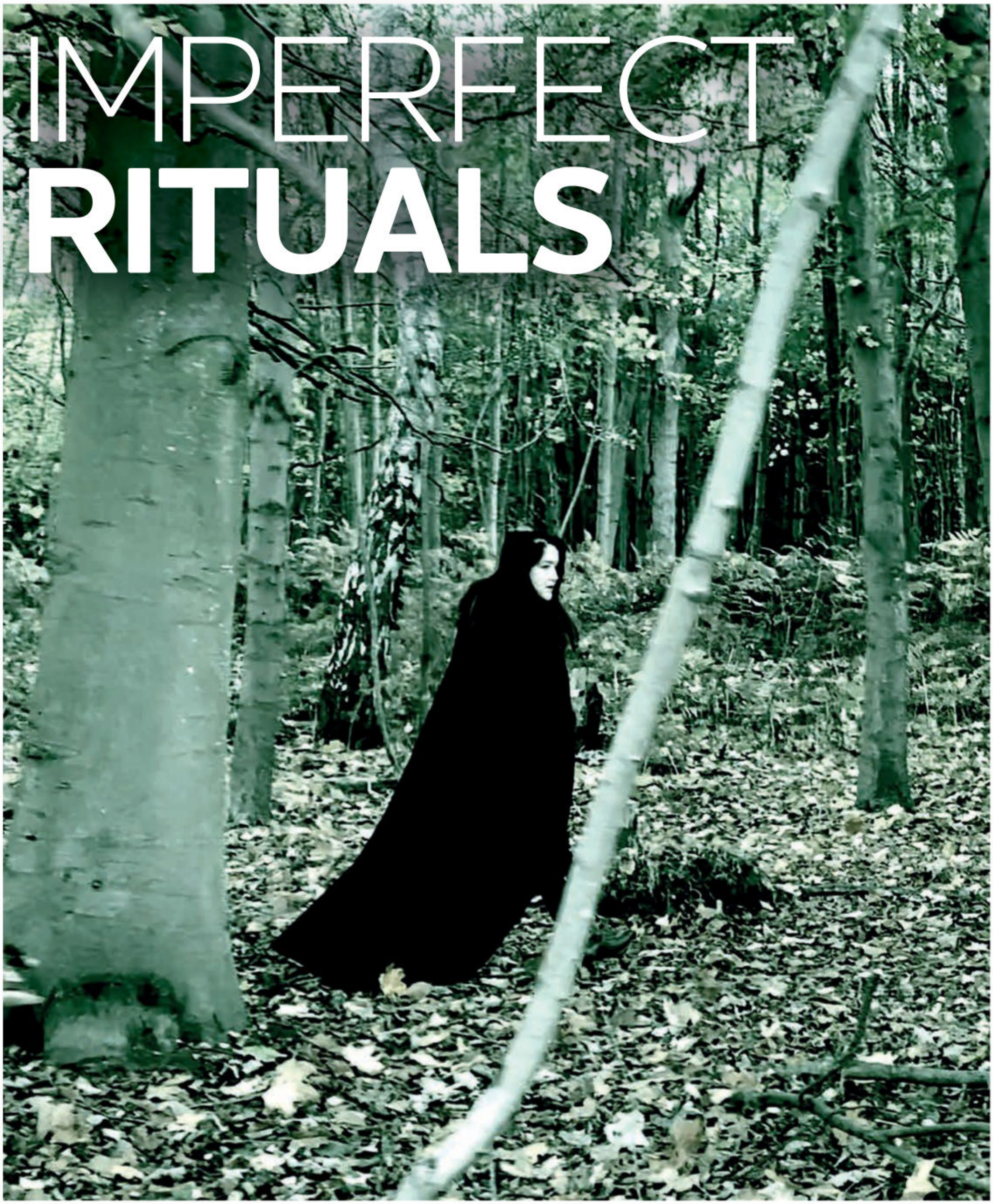


Olivia Cheves speaks to composer and musician **Laura Cannell** about her compulsion to make music, why she had to find her own traditions and why she'd love to record an album in an aircraft hangar

Lily Monsey

"I've always been majorly aware of my own taste," says Laura Cannell. "There's lots of people that can do amazing traditional music really, really well. And even though I can play a lot of traditional music, it doesn't always speak to me. I really needed to find my own tradition."

The composer, recorder player, violinist and label owner is certainly singular in her artistic approach. Her music eludes easy categorisation, sitting at the confluence of early and medieval styles, Baroque, European folk and modern experimentalism. She records most of her music in one improvised swoop, attuned to and in collaboration with the space around her, whether it be the vaulted interior of an East Anglian church ruin (2017's *HUNTER HUNTRESS HAWKER*), the cavernous expanse of the Wapping Hydraulic Power Station (2020's *The Earth with Her Crowns*) or the resonant shell of the Southwold Lighthouse (2016's *Simultaneous Flight Movement*).

"The way that I record and make music is often ritualistic," Cannell explains, "in the sense that I take my instruments and I drive off to a church and, if it's empty, I just sneak in and play. That's part of my ritual for making myself better at what I do and pushing myself, it's to keep giving myself new spaces and new landscapes." She adds that she currently has her heart set on an aircraft hangar.

Cannell has been prolific with releases since her 2014 solo debut *Quick Sparrows Over the Black Earth* – prior to that she was part of the innovative early-folk outfit Horses Brawl. A quick look at the Bandcamp page of her label, Brawl Records, unveils 30+ albums, EPs, collaborations, remixes, concept projects, field recordings and live sessions. "I feel like I'm holding myself back if I don't let myself write as much music as I want to," says Cannell.

She's currently in the midst of a 12-part series, *Year of Lore*, where she'll record and release a new EP for every month of 2024. It's the second time Cannell has attempted such a challenge – in 2021 she teamed up with cellist and Crash Ensemble artistic director Kate Ellis for *These Feral Lands – A Year Documented in Sound and Art*, a sonic diary series responding to the changing months of a unique year. This latest run sees Cannell working solo, interpreting ancient found fragments and the lores of nature, soundtracking her own speculative history of Doggerland – a now-sunken stretch of Pleistocene land beneath the North Sea that once connected the UK to mainland Europe. "I'm not recording them ahead of time, because I want them to be kind of instant. You can get a little instalment of how I'm feeling and where the music's going."

When we speak, Cannell is also preparing for three shows at the Norfolk & Norwich Festival where she is this year's Artist in Residence. The first of the three festival shows will see Cannell performing her 2022 album *Antiphony of the Trees* in Norwich Cathedral – one of her favourite buildings in the city, and one that, until now, she's never had the opportunity to collaborate with. She's also working with the Norfolk Folklore Society as a live accompanist for their storytelling experience exploring the grisly history of Norwich's former gothic jail: the Guildhall.

The third show will see the revival of *Modern Ritual* – Cannell's own performance series that she has helmed since 2017. Each show sees a line-up of musicians, writers, actors and makers as they investigate personal and artistic rituals through music, words and, in this iteration, live pottery throwing. For Cannell, it's a concept that lets artists play in the space between their performer identity and their personal one. "Everybody has funny rituals, and ideas and patterns in their work," says Cannell. "I like to explore the humanness of playing and the nature of never playing the same thing twice in the same way. And I think it gives you confidence, because it's not about being perfect, it's about being present, and being in the room."

The residency marks a seminal moment for the musician, who was born and raised in Norwich, and whose family history in the area dates back 11 generations. "It's funny," she muses. "You can go all around the world, but in your own town you don't always get that recognition usually. So it feels really nice to be wholly doing the music that I am making and collaborating with other people, but in the place that really started it all off."

Cannell is a self-taught traditional fiddler with an extensive education in classical recorder playing, but it wasn't the folk legacies of her hometown that lit the musical spark in her. "Being from Norfolk, there are traditions here, but they didn't really speak to me – like shanties," she concedes. Instead, Cannell looked further back, at European traditions, alighting on medieval minstrels like French poet and composer Guillaume de Machaut, and German abbess Hildegard Von Bingen. "What I wanted to do is bring all of those things together to make my own voice," she says. "I would study and study and study, and play and play all the repertoire and music by those people. But the best way for me to find myself was to do that, and then cast it all aside, and see what was there."

> "I take my instruments and I drive off to a church and, if it's empty, I just sneak in and play"

What was there was the sound that has since become Cannell's calling card: rugged, raw and technically complex, built on imagination, improvisation, intuition and the many facets of genre, art, architecture and history that fuel them.

"It's like when you're little and you start playing – you don't realise how much music is going in all the time, into your head and under your fingers. You've got all this mechanical muscle memory, you've got the feeling of the music, you've got all this harmony already inside you. I wanted to find a way of trusting that I had something to say. And not feeling like because I don't fit into one tradition, I'm not a traditional musician." ◆

***+ Laura Cannell** will be performing three times at Norfolk & Norwich Festival (May 10-26). 'When I Returned You Were Gone', from the Year of Lore series, appears on this issue's compilation, track 12*

WHO NEEDS LAND?

Irish vocal group **Landless** follow-up their much-loved debut album with a new set of songs focused on female protagonists. ***Emma Rycroft*** finds out its harmonious story

The four members of Landless – Ruth Clinton, Sinéad Lynch, Méabh Meir and Lily Power – had known each other through various sessions, Clinton explains, before they came together for a traditional singing performance at a festival in Drogheda. "We didn't necessarily have ambitions to record or perform or anything, but it was kind of organic," she says of the group's development.

They are now set to release their second album, *Lúireach* (meaning Breastplate or Hymn for Protection), their first with Glitterbeat. It is themed around new and traditional songs which tell women's stories. "We're in our Brigid's era for sure," says Power, citing the Irish saint, symbol of feminism and patron of healers and poets.

Landless' first two releases – 2014's self-titled EP and 2018's debut album *Bleaching Bones* – were completely a capella, but *Lúireach* sees them bring in instrumentation. "[We] had been incorporating pipe organ [live] because I'm an organist," Clinton recollects, "we'd get invited to sing in churches a fair bit because it suits the sound, so if there was an organ in the room, we'd make use of it. So that part was already present, we just hadn't recorded it. [Méabh] was saying that with our previous album we recorded in churches and particularly reverberant rooms, so that was the fore… This time around, we wanted a bit of a closer vocal thing. So, we were doing it in the studio and then it made sense to add a bit of instrumentation. And I suppose because we've got access to these great musicians as well, like [Lankum's] Cormac [MacDiamarda] and Alex [Borwick], who were willing to contribute to it." They are keen to acknowledge, too, the work of longstanding manager Vincent Dermody and producer John 'Spud' Murphy (Lankum, ØXN), who also produced *Bleaching Bones*, in this new work.

> "We don't spend time trying to sound the same as each other… we each have our own accents"

The instrumentation is well arranged, with restraint. Traditional song 'The Grey Selkie of

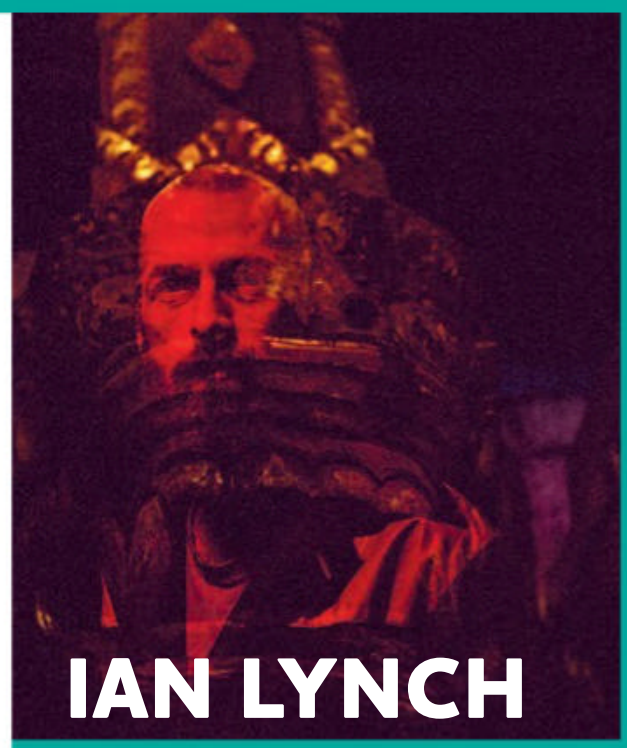
Cormac MacDiarmada. Ishmael Claxton

Skerry' features long single chords and notes from Clinton's pump organ, just when the tragic denouement is reached, lifting feeling at the right moment. 'The Fisherman's Wife', written by Ewan MacColl and recorded with Peggy Seeger's permission, describes a woman left behind on land, her work unacknowledged by her fisherman husband and community. An eerie, staccato piano note persists behind first a single, lonely voice, and then all four voices, powerfully coming together.

There are also songs that remain purely vocal – listen out for the lilting 'Blackwaterside', an unusual version learnt from Traveller Paddy Doran. The chorus, with its alternating rhythms, is magic. Throughout *Lúireach*, the audible contrasts between each voice in Landless are striking. Especially as these different timbres and deliveries create harmonies that ring. "We don't spend time trying to sound the same as each other," says Clinton. "I know other vocal groups will really work on having the same pronunciation and everything like that, whereas we kind of, we have our own accents... when we're using ornamentation in our singing, we'll all do that freely as it comes to each of us. We'd never get into the weeds of making sure we all sing like just one voice. I don't think we've ever been interested in doing that."

Lúireach's closing track, 'Ej Husári', is particularly interesting as the album's only non-Irish song. "We've gone over to Slovakia a couple of times, to this festival in the Tatras Mountains, and we've done the singing workshops there, and their vocal style is so different to ours," explains Clinton, "It's very strident, you know, belty... and this song, which they taught us at the time but also comes from an archival recording... it's closer to our own style of singing... we performed it while we were over there and I think the people were kind of like, 'huh!', bemused by it because we sort of Irish-ified it." Lynch adds, "it's actually a song about a woman who's desperately looking for her lover, her tsar, who's been killed. But it sounds very lullaby-ish... It's really beautiful. And it's nice to try and sing in a different language." It starts off almost as a hymn – with a single, high, soft voice before, as Lynch notes, the voices disperse into a calming, lullaby-esque croon, with support from a *shruti* box and MacDiarmada's strings. A soothing end to an album of songs that, as Lynch puts it, Landless have "live[d] with" before setting to record.

+ ***Lúireach*** *will be reviewed in #199 (July 2024). 'The Fisherman's Wife' appears on this issue's compilation, track 11*



IAN LYNCH

Before Lankum, Ian Lynch was on a career into academia: lecturing in Irish folklore and readying to start a PhD on the subject. Then, the band's popularity soared and he had to put it on hold. "For a couple of years I was like, 'I'm just touring all the time, I'm really tired, [and there's] a large part of my brain I'm not using doing this,'" he explains. "Then I started *Fire Draw Near* and I was like 'oh, that's what I've been missing,'... I missed research and spending time by myself reading books."

We're sitting in a cosy pub in Dalkey, Dublin, discussing the creation of Lynch's podcast, a platform through which he shares his vast knowledge of folklore and music. Each episode of *Fire Draw Near* has a theme which Lynch talks the listener through casually, with a playful, knowing charm: he has covered Cajun music, Sinead O'Connor's legacy, Palestine, sea shanties... the list goes on. The range and amount of music he packs in is impressive, with episodes featuring the likes of English punk band Cock Sparrer and doo-woppers The Clovers in among The Dubliners, Willie Clancy and lesser-known singers from Ireland and beyond.

"For the bonus episodes," Lynch says, "I've been making my way through the Roud ballad index, so I'll go song by song... the only prerequisite for me is that it's a song that exists within the tradition in Ireland... I'll have a look around my own collections and also online, see if there are enough versions to make an episode and then I'll have a look at the history of it and if there's enough of a kind of narrative there." Many (though by no means all) of these songs are recognisable in some form ('Barbara Ellen', 'The Butcher Boy'), but Lynch's search for narrative and different versions of each open them up for totally new understandings.

Many of Lynch's podcast subjects have a dark bent – see 'Long Lankin', the bonus episode about a murderous figure of lore that murders a mother and child in the night. This is partly due to the nature of folk legends, but it's also the aesthetic he admits being drawn to. Which is why his latest project, composing the soundtrack to an Irish folkloric horror film, *All You Need is Death*, is the perfect fit. Lynch is a self-confessed "big horror nerd," and, he enthuses, "the whole thing is about an ancient ballad." He said yes fairly immediately when asked if he'd do it: "I was like... this is what I've been waiting for my whole life."

In discussing the film with Lynch, director Paul Duane shared the script, including the bones of the plot's crux: that ancient ballad. Duane had written the lyrics in English, but it was up to Lynch, who holds a degree in old Irish, to translate it into the ancient language and build a song around it. With dedicated help from poet and scholar Hildred Crill, he developed 'Old God Rising'. Sung by actor Olwen Fouéré, with organ surrounding her, it's a skewering and grisly listen on a soundtrack grounded in darkness.

The closing track is the ultimate, rather fun, coming together of gore and horror tropes. A collage of Fouéré's studio vocals in among metal uproar, it was put together by Malthusian, who, in Lynch's words, are "just the heaviest... messed up metal band, I can think of, from Ireland at the moment." It's a euphoric, screaming end to a wonderfully eerie soundscape.

As we drink our pints and chat through these different projects, Lynch shows me his *Wicker Man* tattoo, excitedly details the work of German linguists in piecing together old Irish and laughs at his drunken Christmas podcast from a few years back. It's wonderful not to be disappointed by the person, passionate and human in equal measure, behind the craft. *EMMA RYCROFT*

+ ***Fire Draw Near*** *is available from soundcloud.com/firedrawnear and podcast providers.* ***All You Need is Death*** *was released in UK/EU cinema on April 19; the soundtrack will be reviewed in #199 (July 2024)*

THE BANJO MAKER

Builder and player of banjos, **Jacken Elswyth**, tells ***Spencer Grady*** how her intimate relationship with the instrument has changed her approach

"*At Fargrounds* feels like one possible culmination of my practice so far, marking the place I've found myself reaching while getting to know my instrument and its repertoire," says London-based banjo player Jacken Elswyth of her latest album. "It brings together tunes I've been playing for a long time, and some I've picked up more recently, plus a set of semi-spontaneous improvisations with accompaniments, building on the *shruti* drone that I use to take my arrangements in radically new directions."

Such intrepidness plays an integral role in all Elswyth's artistic projects – from her inspired high-concept solo releases and involvement with the ever-compelling Shovel Dance Collective, to her instrument-building and curation of the Betwixt & Between imprint. With an adventurous approach to music-making mirroring remarkably catholic tastes (during our conversation she namechecks American Primitive guitarists John Fahey and Robbie Basho, free-improvisers Rhodri Davies and Joëlle Léandre, fellow forward-thinking banjoist Nathan Bowles, as well as avant-metallers Sunn O))) and Nadja), she boldly refuses to reverence tradition like a cache of holy relics waiting to be wheeled out at the next folk revival.

"I'm really motivated by a sense of continuation, of picking something up and moving forwards with it," Elswyth elaborates. "Musicians need to actively engage with folk music in this way, allowing artists to preserve and progress at the same time. We're all pitching in with an ongoing process, rather than restarting something that has stalled. That's certainly what I hope I'm doing."

With its animated juxtapositions of revised old standards and atomised abstracts peeling back the constraining flesh on customary clawhammer-style rhythms, *At Fargrounds* breathes fresh life into the instrumental folk form. Elswyth gives it further energy through her deft use of extended techniques (bow and pick) and an approach to extemporisation informed by fluid tune-playing ("the traditional leads the improvisational, rather than vice versa"). These profound aspects of her craft are cultured by Elswyth's home-building (a process imaginatively documented on the absorbing 2021 album, *Banjo with the Sound of Its Own Making*), fostering an intimate bond between instrument and player.

> "The traditional leads the improvisational, rather than vice versa"

"Making my own banjos has helped me think of them in a more dynamic way," she explains. "Now that I have built a few I feel I've a much clearer awareness of string tension and its interaction with the skin, and the ways that together they shape the banjo's sound. It's helped me to incorporate different approaches into my playing, to view the banjo less as fixed and stable, and more as a moveable frame, supporting tensioned, resonating elements with which I'm interacting."

At Fargrounds also reflects Elswyth's deep-seated fascination for sustained tones, a love affair ignited by the long-form psychedelic experiments of the 90s New Weird America underground and UK psych-noise outliers such as Michael Flower, Ashtray Navigations and Vibracathedral Orchestra, with the album preserving the pulsating throb of her previous solo outings, dropping hypnotic tonal accompaniment on tracks such as the chiming 'Lost Gander' and gloriously dissonant 'Who Remembers'.

"I was already interested in slow, drone-ish music when I started listening to folk music and, with the banjo, the drone is inescapable anyway, as its fifth string insistently cuts through whatever melody is being played," explains Elswyth.

"Now I'm always looking for tunes that feel like they'll speak productively to a drone. The piece 'Jack Lattin' from the new album is an obvious example of that, as it's drawn from the border pipes repertory. I love the way drones are used in spiritual jazz, but it feels quite different to the way that most folk musicians are using them. In spiritual or cosmic jazz, the drone is transcendent, hopeful, upward-looking, while the drone in contemporary folk is usually earthy, dark, downward-looking. But maybe in the future we can find a way to reconcile the two approaches, so they can speak to each other: as above, so below."

***+ At Fargrounds** is reviewed on p59. 'Lost Gander' appears on this issue's compilation, track 13*

Eleni Parousi

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PIPES OF JOY

Jo Frost speaks to Scottish smallpipes player **Malin Lewis** whose free, celebratory music acts as the ultimate form of self-expression

Jonathon Doyle

WIN

We have 3 copies of *Halocline* to give away. To enter, answer: Which inspiring Helsinki institution did Lewis spend a year at?

See 21 for competition rules

There's plenty to pique one's interest with Malin Lewis' debut album. Rising out of the waves, like a mystical sea creature, eyes closed, hair flowing and crowned in a headdress of shells, the image of Lewis on the cover certainly commands attention. With a nod to Marsha P Johnson, the 60s gay icon and a key activist during the Stonewall uprising, the young musician, composer and instrument maker marks their arrival on the Scottish music scene with flair and individuality.

Then there's the album title: *Halocline*, a word that unless you're a marine biologist merits some explanation. The visible layer of water that forms between saltwater and freshwater, it's a word that encapsulates Lewis who identifies as trans/non-binary: "I really loved it as a metaphor for being trans and living in this in-between space that's a mixture of the two, but it's got its own unique microbial ecosystem," Lewis explains. "My gender and music have always been intertwined; music is my form of self-expression. That's something that I want to celebrate."

Lewis grew up in north-west Scotland, first on the tiny island of Eilean Shona, then the isle of Skye where, aged seven, they started learning the pipes – a welcome distraction from school. "I was always fascinated by the timbre and how these little things that vibrate can actually make a sound… I think that was the most interesting thing to me: how do instruments work, rather than the actual music."

This fascination set Lewis off on a path of experimentation, initially making instruments by drilling holes into sticks. "I was buying drill

ANGHARAD JENKINS & PATRICK RIMES

After 15 years of pushing the boundaries of traditional music with Welsh folk band Calan, two of Wales' most accomplished fiddle players, Angharad Jenkins and Patrick Rimes, united as a duo to reveal the raw beauty of Welsh folk music on their debut full-length album, *amrwd*.

The word *amrwd*, meaning 'raw' in Welsh, embodies their approach to the album, which was recorded entirely live to capture the authenticity of their performance (with only an occasional overdub). Jenkins and Rimes blend traditional tunes, songs and original compositions developed over their years of collaboration for the album. Their deep connection and trust as musicians shines in their fiddle duets.

"With this album, we didn't really need to prepare anything," Jenkins explains. "It's lovely because it's so intuitive playing with Patrick. I think because we've been playing together for so long, it's like slotting back into a pair of slippers. It's really comfortable and natural. That's the absolute joy that I get from playing with Patrick. It's just easy, really easy."

Popular Welsh songs 'Calon Lân' and 'Tra Bo Dau' are stripped down to their core on *amrwd* and re-

bits on eBay," Lewis laughs, explaining that at the age of 14 they learned how to wood turn and made their first set of pipes. Four years later, Lewis met Donald Lindsay, a composer and musical instrument maker who invented a 3D pipe printing technique and devised the Lindsay System Chanter. Lewis ended up making their own version in wood and began composing music for it. One of the first tunes they wrote was 'Trans' – something Lewis describes as being their 'Coming Out' tune, a '*euphoric celebration of individuality, being yourself, gender diversity and being trans.*' This track was one of the highlights of Lewis' much-lauded *New Voices* performance at Celtic Connections in 2023, featuring many of the tunes that appear on *Halocline*.

Another significant influence on Lewis' music-making was the year they spent in Helsinki at the Sibelius Academy. Besides discovering a dedicated group of people intent on reviving Finland's bagpipe-playing tradition, Lewis spent time with musicians such as Frigg and Timo Alakotila who helped inform their love of improvisation, something they now teach at The National Piping Centre in Glasgow. "I love the freeness of improvising, but also the possibilities and this idea of growth and doing things that you didn't expect yourself to do and feel that you could, so a lot of my tunes come out of that."

From the wistful opener 'Hiraeth' and the breezy 'Cycle Lane' featuring Okra Playground's Maija Kauhanen on vocals and *kantele* through to the lively 'Elision', *Halocline* is a hugely arresting debut from a highly original and talented artist.

***+ Halocline** is out now on Hudson Records and will be reviewed in Songlines #199 (July 2024)*

arranged with simplicity in mind. For Jenkins and Rimes, the album marks a conscious step back from the fast-paced, more intricate arrangements of Calan's records and sees them focus instead on the strength of the core material.

"Having come from playing with Calan, where we spend a lot of time working on arrangements which are sometimes quite complicated, we just wanted to simplify everything. We wanted to strip everything back and just present some of the music that we've been playing together in its simplest and purest form".

RHODRI MCDONAGH

Laurentina Miksys

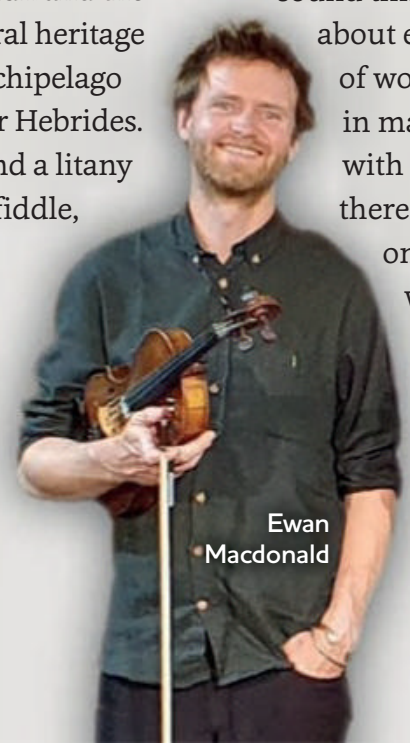
SEABIRD, FLY HOME

Russ Slater Johnson hears from **Garefowl**'s **Ewan Macdonald** about his connections to the last British seabird made extinct and why he will soon be recording on the Scottish isle where the bird was killed

In 1840, four men in St Kilda caught a great auk and tied it up. When a storm erupted three days later, they killed the bird, believing it to be a witch and the cause of the storm. Ewan Macdonald heard this story, the tale of the last British great auk, when he was a kid – after all, one of those three men was his relative Lachlan Mackinnon. "It was one of a few family stories that had been passed down from [my dad's] parents," he remembers. "My dad is a biologist and did his PhD on fulmars, so seabirds were kind of close at hand growing up." In 2020, intrigued by an idea proposed by his dad to mark the 180th anniversary of the auk's killing, Macdonald started Garefowl, using the St Kilda word for a great auk as its name. "I soon got really into everything to do with great auks," says Macdonald. "They were such an incredible bird and it's a real tragedy that we drove them to extinction." Together with six other musicians, Garefowl released *Cliffs* in 2020, a homage to the last great auk and the history, culture and natural heritage of St Kilda – a Scottish archipelago 40 miles west of the Outer Hebrides. The album used vocals and a litany of stringed instruments (fiddle, viola, cello, *bouzouki*, banjo and mandolin) to evoke the drama of the bird's extinction and the island's desolate, weather-beaten locale.

This May, Garefowl will be visiting St Kilda to write the follow-up in situ. For Macdonald it will fulfil a long-standing goal: "Hearing my dad and my aunt talk about their experiences and the family history on the island was really the thing that built that connection with the island for me. However, this summer will be the first time for me actually getting over there! It makes this trip even more exciting." Motivated by a 2023 seabird census that showed that there has been a 61% overall decline in birds on the archipelago since 1999, each track on the new album will be named after a seabird. "St Kilda has the biggest seabird colonies in Europe, there's up to a million birds there," says Macdonald. "But, they are in real trouble on a number of fronts. Climate change is forcing them to fly further to find fish, so they end up being exhausted by the journey."

Discussing how making the album will differ from the debut, he says: "We're exploring a more bare and stripped-back sound this time, and we're really excited about experimenting with new ways of working... We're really interested in making sounds in dialogue with nature, and so while we're out there we'll be sticking contact mics on various things and seeing what we can hear." Coming back to his reasons for once more returning to St Kilda as inspiration, Macdonald says, "I guess in a way it's penance for the way my relation killed that poor great auk."



Ewan Macdonald

Andy Sowerby

SWEET & LOWDOWN

Tim Cumming talks to **Daisy Rickman**, a self-taught artist, multi-instrumentalist and mesmerisingly deep-voiced singer from Mousehole, Cornwall

Both sun and moon find their centres of gravity in Cornish folk singer and multi-instrumentalist Daisy Rickman's music. Her home-recorded debut, *Donsya A'n Loryow* (Dance of the Moons) appeared in 2022, followed this year by *Howl* (Sun), a second home-recorded solo creation, employing guitars, bass, drums, percussion, *sitar*, cello, *bouzouki*, banjo, accordion, clarinet, fiddle and synthesizer.

"I learnt by jamming with people and playing with other musicians," Rickman says. "I moved from Cornwall to Brighton when I was 18 [and later Berlin, then Bridport] and met a lot of musicians there, and we'd have these big jam sessions, which is where music really opened up for me. There was no judgement as to what you played or what your skill was. It was a very open space. Then discovering open tunings opened up a lot."

Influences she draws into her musical orbit include Bert Jansch, Karen Dalton and Anne Briggs, alongside the Velvet Underground and *kosmische* ambient greats Popol Vuh. And while the layered textures of the music, with sitar foaming up through layers of cello, accordion, fiddle and more, exert a strong pull, it's Rickman's voice that goes deep. Literally – she sings in a register inhabited by few aside from her and Nico.

"I like trying to reach different levels of voice, especially the really low octaves," she says. "It's reaching down into the deeper parts of yourself. It feels very grounding. I find it hard doing that live," she adds, "but it's good practice to put yourself into positions where you do feel out of your depth or nervous. Although I much prefer the recording process, it feels very similar to painting. I like the spirit of experimenting."

As a painter, her work spans from atmospheric night skyscapes to more symbolic, semi-abstract imagery. They are both, however, made in homage "to the sun, the stars," she says, "and explorations of the cycles both within ourselves and throughout the turning wheel of the year."

As a native of Cornwall, more down-to-earth matters preoccupy her as well. "Things in Cornwall are pretty grim," she says. "We want people to come and enjoy Cornwall, but I read the other day that there are currently 296 properties to rent in Cornwall, while there are 13,000 second homes. I guess it's like anywhere that becomes gentrified. But it can be heartbreaking."

Though not a fluent speaker of the language, Rickman often sings in Cornish. "'Howl' is Cornish for sun," she says. "The title of the last song, 'Howlsedhesow', means 'Sunset'. The song 'Bleujen an Howl' means 'Sunflower', while 'Omlesa' means 'Expanding'. And there's the 'Winter Solstice' song… When making an album," she continues, "I spend a lot of time thinking about how it feels as a whole piece, rather than individual songs. I wanted the album to progress from sunrise to sunset, so I guess it's a concept album. I do a lot of visual art and I approach music in a similar way, in terms of creating a piece of work that stands in its own realm."

***+ Howl** is reviewed on p62. 'Bleujen an Howl' is on this issue's compilation, track 14.*

Dave Brown

GOBLIN BAND

Goblin Band may be newcomers, but they already have the support of British folk royalty. Martin Carthy has praised them, saying, "they can play and they can sing and they're fearless." And it's easy to see why. This 'queer folk sextet' are young, fresh and original. They love medieval and early music, playing *crumhorn*, hurdy-gurdy and mandola alongside squeezeboxes, violin, guitar and drums. They are highly political, but as their debut EP *Come Slack Your Horse!* proves, they are happy to include comic and silly songs, too. And when playing live, they change their repertoire with the changing seasons. "It gives it more heft," says singer and multi-instrumentalist Rowan Gatherer.

The band took their name from Hobgoblin, the music store specialising in hard-to-find instruments. It was in the shop's London branch that they started, after Rowan, living in Devon during lockdown, was advised by a friend that he should meet with singer and squeezebox player Sonny Brazil, who works at the store. They began playing together, and in spring 2022, held private sessions in Hobgoblin after closing time, with friends and others who worked at the shop. "It was great," says Rowan, "you could make as much noise as you want, as late as you like, and there are instruments all over the walls."

By the end of the year, they had formed into a band, with Gwenna Harman on vocals, Piran Casely on mandola, Paul Gardner on drums and Alice Beadle on violin.

They hope to show traditional songs' relevance today as "folk music can have a bad reputation with young people who don't understand, and think it's at best stagnant and at worst regressive." So, the aim is to engage with the songs in "a meaningful, politically switched-on way." The EP's sleeve notes relate old songs to today: 'The Brisk Lad' who breaks the law to feed his family sadly has many modern counterparts, while the Irish song 'May Morning Dew', which deals with displacement, is connected to Palestine.

Then there are the fun pieces. There's 'Tumut Hoer', a song about turnips, considered '*the unofficial folk anthem of Wiltshire*,' and the old Dartmoor classic 'Widecombe Fair' – the one featuring the '*Uncle Tom Cobbley and all*' refrain. Rowan argues "I'm passionate that the band doesn't feel limited to certain types of folk music. It covers the entire spectrum of human emotion, whether it's heart-breaking or inane, stupid, moving, disgusting or beautiful… and to ignore the less serious side is a mistake… it's entertainment."

ROBIN DENSELOW

***+ Come Slack Your Horse!** is reviewed on p59*

Enricco Policardo

MELODIOUS BEGINNINGS

The leafy backdrop of Box Hill, Surrey feels like the right place for the National Youth Folk Ensemble (NYFE) of the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS) to have their third residential of the year. The 2023/24 ensemble is comprised of 22 musicians between 14 and 18 years old. It's the only national folk youth group in England and, despite being smaller than other ensembles out there, holds a clear vision of encouraging young people to discover, play and love folk music.

"Everyone around you is giving you a big supportive hug," says tutor and folk musician Miranda Rutter. After being briefed to compose their own tune that morning in small groups, we've reached the moment when the musicians play their 'works in progress' for the class. Earlier, Jo Freya, the ensemble's artistic director, had explained to me that some ensemble members hadn't composed music before joining last year.

Embedded within EFDSS, the NYFE enlists many of its members through free open days, offering young people their first taste of English folk. Once the ensemble is signed up, musicians such as Nancy Kerr, Sam Sweeney and Sam Partridge tutor them on how to improve their craft.

The team behind the ensemble takes pastoral care as seriously as the music itself, with two staff members dedicated to providing support. "There's been a lot of issues with young people's mental health in recent years, which was exacerbated by COVID," says EFDSS' education director Rachel Elliott. "We want to make this the most positive environment possible. They're more likely to make great music if they feel happy."

Yet, amid the melodies, there lies a challenge: the perception of English folk music as a predominantly white genre. The ensemble is playing its part in changing that. "We need to situate ourselves as part of an alliance of people involved in folk roots across the world," Elliott tells me. In recent years, the ensemble has been tutored by musicians including Brazilian percussionist Adriano Adewale, *tabla* performer and composer Kuljit Bhamra and Haitian artist Germa Adan. "Some have a genuine worry that English traditional music as we stereotypically think of it, might somehow disappear," Freya says. "But I don't hold to that. I came into folk music via Steeleye Span: electric folk. When you get to hear different stuff, it takes you in different directions."

There have been multiple conversations over the residencies about cultural appropriation, sometimes involving visiting artists. "If somebody offers you their music and they are happy for you to then interpret it with respect, [Kuljit Bhamra] certainly doesn't view it as cultural misappropriation. And I don't either," says Freya.

As we listen to the fruits of the morning's musical endeavours, I think about something Rutter had said earlier. How the ensemble is a living, breathing entity, comprised not only of its members but also of the collective efforts of its tutors, directors and support staff, creating cohesive music that goes far beyond the notes played. *IZZY FELTON*

National Youth Folk Ensemble, class of 2023

Roswitha Chesher

UK Festival Guide 2024

Another year, another full season of festivals to revive the soul and please the senses! Where better to plan your summer of culture than with our annual guide to the best festivals in the UK?

WORDS BY JUSTIN TURFORD

May 4-26
Brighton Festival
Brighton, East Sussex
Guest-directed this year by screenwriter and children's author Frank Cottrell-Boyce, Brighton's splendid multi-disciplinary arts festival continues to deliver a unique vision. Aside from the cutting-edge theatre and visual arts events, and inclusive family and literary experiences, there are plenty of excellent musical diversions. Orchestra Baobab and the great Cuban pianist Roberto Fonseca lead the global music selections and the folk attractions include The Young'Uns and Johnny Flynn's enjoyable collaboration with nature writer Robert Macfarlane.
brightonfestival.org

May 15-18
The Great Escape
Brighton, East Sussex
greatescapefestival.com

May 10-26
Norfolk & Norwich Festival
Various locations, Norfolk
The broad arts brush of the Norfolk and Norwich Festival consistently offers a wonderful blend of literature, music, theatre and visual delights, and this year it continues to be inspired. The Queen of *Kuduro*, Pongo, brings her energetic club sound to the Spiegeltent, which also hosts Scottish singer-songwriter Karine Polwart, Stick in

the Wheel, Nubiyan Twist and the exuberant Afro-Brazilian collective Baque Luar. Elsewhere, there will be an extraordinary eight-hour organ world premiere of Jonny Greenwood's *268 Years of Reverb* performed by James McVinnie & Eliza McCarthy and three performances featuring artist-in-residence Laura Cannell.
nnfestival.org.uk

May 16-19
Songlines Encounters Festival
Kings Place, London
kingsplace.co.uk/whats-on/songlines-encounters-festival

May 23-26
Knockengorroch Festival
Knockengorroch, Dumfries and Galloway
The much-loved festival situated against the beautiful backdrop of the Carsphairn Hills of Kirkcudbrightshire returns with another strikingly progressive line-up of Celtic diaspora, roots, global and electronic artists. Music includes Sámi singer Kajsa Balto, the energetic Roma band Zor, alt-folk duo The Breath, Northumbrian pipes fusioneers Kathryn Tickell & The Darkening, and Scottish folk legend Mairi Campbell. Among the many acclaimed electronic and reggae acts attending, Trinidad's Queen Omega & The Royal Souls is a must-see. Sunday's infamous *ceilidh* session will be propelled by the Scottish Borders' Jiginaboot Ceilidh Band and others.
knockengorroch.org.uk

May 23-26
Orkney Folk Festival
Various locations, Orkney
Designed to offer something for everyone, 52 events are planned for this year's festival with superb international artists joining the home-grown acts. Award-winning Canadian outfit The East Pointers return to the UK after a long hiatus, Ireland is represented by the legendary musicians Máirtín O'Connor, Cathal Hayden and Seamie O'Dowd, as well as the rarely seen live Dòchas. Michael McGoldrick & John McCusker will be joined by Orcadian Kris Drever, combining the talents of three heavyweights in the UK folk scene, and the popular Gathering concert returns, with a tribute to Orcadian musician Billy Jolly.
orkneyfolkfestival.com

May 24-27
Chippenham Folk Festival
Chippenham, Wiltshire
The 51st edition of Chippenham Folk Festival sees a huge line-up of talent this year with award-laden legends rubbing shoulders with local acts across this lovely market town nestled on the banks of the River Avon. Included are seven-times BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards-winner John Tams, the imaginative contemporary folk of Scotland's Breabach, Sheffield's a cappella virtuosos Melrose Quartet, the great solo artist Tim Edey and festival patron, John Kirkpatrick MBE.
chippfolk.co.uk

Garry Jones; Shenell Kennedy

IFE OGUNJOBI

From the outside, flying solo seems pretty daunting. Ife Ogunjobi, however, doesn't seem too phased. Last September he branched out from the comfort of Ezra Collective, South East London's favourite (and Mercury Prize-winning) quintet, and released his first EP as a bandleader, *Stay True*. "As it's my first project, I'm giving people a slice of me," he says over a voice note, "a piece of me on a plate." He explains that the overwhelmingly positive response to this almost sacrificial level of exposure has further bolstered him. The trumpeter's original confidence and success, however, he credits to his beginnings.

"I learnt so much from being in the band that when it came to doing my own project I feel I've had a head start in lots of ways," he explains. And the EP definitely doesn't sound like a first release. Tight across the five tracks, with 'A Better Place (feat SUR NATE)' offering a melodic surprise, the release blends Ife's Nigerian heritage with his South London influences, resulting in something that's both fresh and polished.

He names genres as diverse as garage and *fújì* as his influences, with figures like Yinka Ayefele and King Sunny Adé dominating his playlists. This personal preference is reflected in the EP. "It's been nice to tell another side of myself musically," he considers, "with Ezra, I'm only one of five members."

This summer, Ife is set to continue playing the project live, including performances at Cross the Tracks and Love Supreme Festival. When asked what punters can expect from the experience he replies: "Me and the guys are going to bring fire, pure fire. So, people better be prepared to have fun." *ERIN COBBY*

May 24 – June 9
Bath Fringe
Bath, Somerset
bathfringe.co.uk

May 26
Cross the Tracks
Brockwell Park, London
xthetracks.com

May 30 – June 3
Fire in the Mountain Festival
Near Aberystwyth, Ceredigion
Rooted on an ancient farm that nestles between the Cambrian mountains and beautiful Cardigan Bay resides a small and beloved music festival, with community, family and a love of folk music at its core. Among the traditional players will be experimental Celtic music purveyor and BBC Young Folk Award-winner Brìghde Chaimbeul, cosmic rockers Henge and Martin Carthy. There are activities for all the family including traditional crafts, dance and singing, and a benevolent ticket pricing structure so all can attend.
fireinthemountain.co.uk

May 31 – June 2
Wychwood Festival
Cheltenham Racecourse, Gloucestershire
wychwoodfestival.com

June 4-15
Flamenco Festival London
Saddler's Wells, London
sadlerswells.com/flamenco-festival-2024

June 7-9
KITE
Kirtlington Park, Oxfordshire
kitefestival.co.uk

June 14-16
Black Deer Festival
Eridge Park, Kent
blackdeerfestival.com

June 14-16
Solas Festival
Errol Park, Errol, Perthshire
solasfestival.co.uk

June 15, July 27, September 7
Green Island Festival
Hulme Community Garden Centre & Niamos, Manchester
Spread across three dates in the summer, this Manchester festival in the urban oasis ▸

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www.bromyardfolkfestival.co.uk

GTSF
Gate To Southwell Festival
Rhiannon Giddens (USA)
July 4th-7th Nottinghamshire
Blue Rose Code Full band
Mànran The Haar (Ire) Daoirí Farrell Trio (Ire)
Kathryn Tickell & The Darkening
Melrose Quartet RegMeuross The Fugitives (Can)
Kathryn Roberts & Sean Lakeman Lizzie No (USA)
AnDannsaDub Campbell/Jensen (USA) The Often Herd
CableStreetCollective Charm of Finches (Aus)
Tara MacLean (Can) Over the Moon (Can) CiderWithMolly
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"Outstanding music...could hardly have wished for more" Folk Radio UK 2021
www.GTSF.uk
"Best live event 2021" Ian Croft, RnR Magazine
17th International Roots Music Festival

Warwick
FOLK FESTIVAL
25 – 28 July 2024
The Unthanks Oysterband
The Spooky Men's Chorale Breabach
Lady Maisery · John Tams · Melrose Quartet
Gnoss · Bonfire Radicals · Merry Hell
Will Pound · Ellie Gowers Trio
Blair Dunlop · The Wilderness Yet
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The heart of Folk
Castle Park, Warwick, CV34 6AX
warwickfolkfestival.co.uk
AFO

of Hulme Community Garden Centre has swiftly transformed into a must-visit. Youthful, forward-looking and with a nice blend of local and emerging international acts. This year's line-up includes Afro-electronic fusionists Afriquoi, the strong feminine energy of Dakar's Def Mama Def, Plantfood's explosive spirituality and Sheffield's positivity-fuelled Life Aquatic Band all promising a good time. Manchester's best street food vendors will keep your bellies full, too.
greenislandfestival.co.uk

June 21-23
Góbé Fest
Cathedral Gardens, Manchester
gobefest.com

June 22-23
Africa Oyé
Sefton Park, Liverpool, Merseyside
Every year, they manage to keep this fantastic festival free despite the calibre of their guests. Headliners include reggae royalty Julian Marley, inter-African female supergroup Les Amazones d'Afrique, Senegal's urban queens Def Mama Def and the traditional polyphonic wonder of Tanzania's The Zawose Queens.
africaoye.com

June 26-30
Glastonbury
Worthy Farm, Pilton, Somerset
As befits the times, there are more pop-friendly acts this year at Worthy Farm but there will always be room for global and roots artists, too. Nigerian Afrobeats superstar Burna Boy hits the Pyramid Stage; multiple award-winner Nitin Sawhney joins UK reggae legends Steel Pulse and cosmic Indian singer Asha Puthli at the West Holts stage; and Pakistani polyglot Arooj Aftab shares The Park Stage with This Is The Kit, Lankum, The Mary Wallopers and the guitar pyrotechnics of Niger's Mdou Moctar.
glastonburyfestivals.co.uk

July 4-7
The Gate to Southwell
Kirklington Parkland, Nottinghamshire
This festival continues to bring the best in roots and acoustic music to Southwell. US Grammy & Pulitzer award-winner Rhiannon Giddens is quite a coup. Canada is also well represented with Tara MacLean and The Fugitives. Scottish supergroup Mànran, the brilliant Kathryn Tickell & The Darkening and Caledonian soul band Blue Rose Code are also among the headliners. For acoustic lovers, Ireland's The Haar, Melrose Quartet and the Australian sister duo Charm of Finches will delight, with English troubadour Reg Meuross also in attendance.
gtsf.uk

July 4-14
Lichfield Festival
Lichfield, Staffs
lichfieldfestival.org

July 4-8
Kelburn Garden Party
Kelburn Country Centre, Largs
kelburngardenparty.com

July 5-7
Love Supreme Festival
Glynde Place, East Sussex
lovesupremefestival.com

July 5-13
Llangollen Fringe
Llangollen, North Wales
llangollenfringe.co.uk

July 5-7
Tonnau Tropical Garden Party
Carreglwyd Estate, Anglesey
tonnaufestival.uk

July 11-14
Stonehaven Folk Festival
Stonehaven, Scotland
stonehavenfolkfestival.co.uk

July 12-14
Priddy Folk Festival
Priddy, Somerset
priddyfolk.org

July 12-14
Ely Folk Festival
Ely, Cambridgeshire
elyfolkfestival.co.uk

Akin Suvari / Jamboree

AKOLÁ TAMBÓ

When London-based Colombian Esteban Card went to see Totó La Momposina live in 2017, he couldn't have known the repercussions of that night. "Something really deep [in me] moved during that concert," he recalls. "I cried a few times and my thirst to know more about these traditional musics started." In particular, he was referring to Afro-Colombian music like *bullerengue* and *cumbia* in its stripped-back voice-and-percussion format. "I researched whatever I could find online and by watching a documentary about Totó I discovered bullerengue and inspiring singers like Etelvina Maldonado. This inspiration and research journey into these ancestral rhythms made me start recording and writing a set of songs at home by myself." The result was Card's solo debut, *INELEMENTUM* (2019), but that was just the beginning, Card continues: "After that process, I went to Colombia on two occasions to experience bullerengue at its birthplace and I got enchanted by its power, and once in London I started teaching about this practice and I started Akolá Tambó." This 14-strong group of men and women have created an unlikely oasis of Afro-Colombian music in the heart of London. Such has been the love for bullerengue that he also started Bullerengue Circle with Valeria Pacific, an organisation providing workshops and festivals in bullerengue across London (and increasingly further afield). They have recently also started a campaign to raise funds for two music schools in Colombia to improve awareness of bullerengue in Colombia itself, where many of the best-known bullerengue performers have either passed away or are in their advanced years.

Akolá Tambó have only released one song to date, the single 'Solecito', but have two albums on the way, one studio-recorded and a live album made with some of Colombia's finest bullerengue singers. This summer they are also going to be very busy with performances at Tonnau Tropical Garden Party, Wilderness, Shambala, Smugglers Festival and others. With bullerengue centred on communion and togetherness, and this group full of passion, they are sure to go down a storm. *RUSS SLATER JOHNSON*

July 12-14
ALSO Festival
Park Farm, Compton Verney, Warwickshire
also-festival.com

July 12-14
Tropical Pressure
Mount Pleasant Eco Park, Porthtowan, Cornwall
In a stunning location overlooking Porthtowan Beach, Tropical Pressure never fails to put a smile on your face. Its music focuses on Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean and there are some great names already lined up: An Dannsa Dub, Kumbia Boruka, Ines Loubet, The Busy Twist, The Zawose Queens, Aluminé Guerrero.
tropicalpressure.co.uk

July 12-21
Liverpool Arab Arts Festival
Liverpool
arabartsfestival.com

July 17-20
HebCelt
Stornoway, Isle of Lewis
hebceltfest.com

July 19-21
Whirl-y-Fayre
Isle of Purbeck, Corfe Castle, Dorset
whirl-y-fayre.co.uk

July 19-21
Speyfest
Fochabers, Parish of Bellie, Moray
Celtic rock outfit Skerryvore return to this excellent festival after last year's success and they are joined by a diverse selection of locals and further-ranging artists. On Friday, the iconic Irish musician Sharon Shannon appears with her trio alongside the exhilarating Scottish folk's Breabach. Saturday sees the anthemic indie-folk of Tide Lines and Sunday's *ceilidh* energy has Trail West leading the charge. There are music workshops, a craft fair and fine local food and beverages.
speyfest.com

SANGJARU
This summer South Korean folk fusion band, Sangjaru, are bringing their eclectic sound to the UK for the first time. Sangjaru's name – '*sanja*' meaning 'box' and '*jaru*' meaning 'sack' in Korean – acts as an analogy for the trio's fusion of traditional folk from their Korean homeland with the sounds of Gypsy jazz, funk and swing from further afield.

After winning the prestigious Sori Frontier competition in 2019, Sangjaru released their debut album, *Taryeong* (2020), showcasing a flair for pushing tradition to other realms and solidifying themselves as one of Korea's most exciting up-and-coming bands. While their latest track 'Somu' is very rooted in traditional music as a reimagining of a folk song that was played to the kings of Joseon, a dynasty that ruled Korea for 500 years, it is brought to the 21st century through its futuristic visuals. A quality that they bring to their live performances too.

The band, made up of Cho Sungyoon on guitar, Kwon Hyochang on *janggu* (hourglass drum) and *kkwaenggwari* (small gong), and Nam Seonghun on *ajaeng* (bowed zither), are known for their lively and visually compelling shows, often changing outfits mid-performance, not what you'd expect from a folk band.

From Asia's largest art space, the National Kaohsiung Art Centre, to taking a spot at Les Escales in Saint Nazaire, France, Sangjaru are more than comfortable showcasing their talents anywhere in the world. Their debut UK performances will take place this July at WOMAD and Cambridge Folk Festival. *IZZY FELTON*

July 21
Folk by the Oak
Hatfield House, Hatfield, Hertfordshire
Situated in the spectacular countryside setting of Hatfield Park, Hertforshire, Folk by the Oak once again deliver a cracking one-day line-up with veteran rabble-rousers The Levellers returning for the first time since 2017 to blow the roof off! Senegalese *kora* master Seckou Keita appears with his superb world-class band as do the close-harmonising Bostonians Darlingside, BBC Folk Award-winners The Young'Uns, rising folk stars The Furrow Collective and The Staves. You must check out charismatic singer-poet Cahalan Morrison on the Acorn Stage too!
folkbytheoak.com

The London Youth Folk Ensemble opening Folk by the Oak's Acorn Stage, as they do every year

July 22-28
Yn Chruinnaght
Peel, Isle of Man
ynchruinnaght.com

July 25-28
Warwick Folk Festival
Castle Park, Warwick, Warwickshire
Against the backdrop of Warwick Castle's mediaeval grandeur, this year's festival promises a musical experience of substance. The Unthanks take centre stage as do the legendary Oysterband. The assembled voices of Australia's The Spooky Men's Chorale will be a treat and Scottish folkies Breabach continue to perform everywhere! John Tams, harmonica magician Will Pound and the vocal trio Lady Maisery are a few of the many brilliant others.
warwickfolkfestival.co.uk

July 25-28
WOMAD
Charlton Park, Malmesbury, Wiltshire
Still the greatest assembling of global musicians in the UK, this year's WOMAD sees the visionary Baaba Maal return to Charlton Park alongside Amadou & Mariam and NOLA's glorious 79rs Gang. The *qawwali* magic of Faiz Ali Faiz will be a life-affirming moment; newcomers Bala Desejo from Rio, and Tanzanian great Hukwe Zawose's daughter and granddaughter, The Zawose Queens, are sure to thrill. The Gnawa fusion of Justin Adams & Moroccan master musician Mohamed Errebbaa will surely be a highlight in a mouth-watering selection of grand artistry.
womad.co.uk

Seungryul Na

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16TH 17TH 18TH AUGUST 2024 IN SUFFOLK

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EXPLORE MORE AT FOLKEAST.CO.UK JOIN THE STORY

July 25-28
Cambridge Folk Festival
Cherry Hinton Hall, Cambridge
An annual highlight of the season, Cambridge Folk has bonafide legend Robert Plant presenting his *Saving Grace* band with Suzi Dian on vocal duties. Grammy-winning bluesman Fantastic Negrito, Nitin Sawhney, Ralph McTell and US folk royalty Peggy Seeger & Family will all also grace the festival. Nora Brown & Stephanie Coleman, Oysterband, Katherine Priddy and reggae revivalist Hollie Cook are also in the line-up.
cambridgelive.org.uk/folk-festival

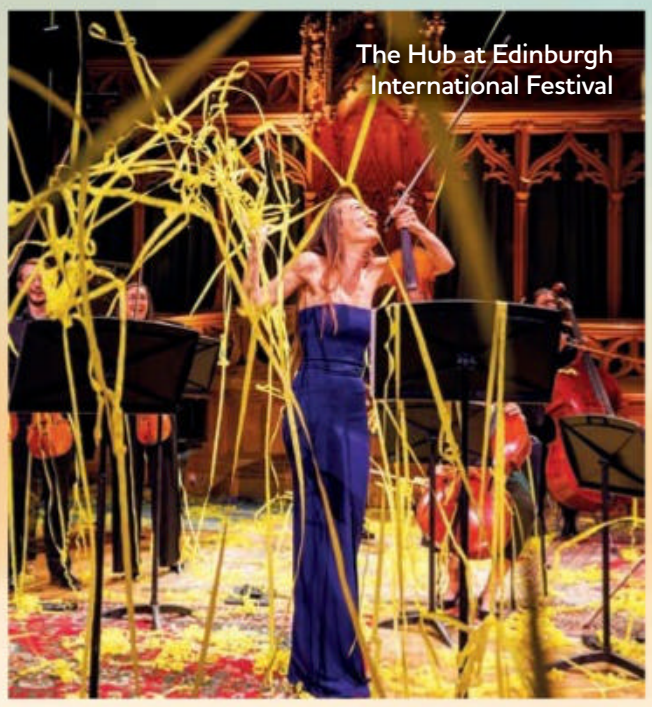
August 1-4
Wickham Festival
Wickham, Hampshire
wickhamfestival.co.uk

August 1-4
Valley Fest
Chew Valley Lake, Somerset
valleyfest.co.uk

August 2-4
Underneath the Stars
Cinderhill Farm, Cawthorne, South Yorkshire
underneaththestarsfest.co.uk

August 2-9
Sidmouth Folk Week
Sidmouth, Devon
Sidmouth hits 70 and is still offering a feast of traditional music, song and dance. The harp/violin duo of Catrin Finch & Aoife Ní Bhriain promises to be spellbinding, as will Angeline Morrison, Peggy Seeger, Ralph McTell and the supergroup that includes Jon Boden and Seth Lakeman. A who's who of UK folk will attend, from Stick in the Wheel and The Breath to the joys of Chris Wood & Andy Cutting.
sidmouthfolkfestival.co.uk

August 2-25
Edinburgh International Festival
Edinburgh
With the theme of *Rituals That Unite Us* guiding this year's event, there are some


The Hub at Edinburgh International Festival

exceptional musical treats. Youssou N'Dour will perform as will the thunderous Balimaya Project. In the festival's 'green room', The Hub, a line-up of global virtuosos will be playing including *sarod* player Soumik Datta, Brazilian *bandolinist* Hamilton de Holanda, Indonesia's Peni Candra Rini and Kyrgyzstan's Ustatshakirt Ensemble.
eif.co.uk

August 7-11
Boomtown Fair
Matterley Estate near Winchester, Hampshire
boomtownfair.co.uk

August 8-10
Fairport Cropredy Convention
Cropredy, Oxfordshire
fairportconvention.com

August 9-16
Broadstairs Folk Week
Broadstairs, Kent
broadstairsfolkweek.org.uk

August 15-18
Green Man
Crickhowell, Powys
Tinariwen, Omar Souleyman, Ibibio Sound Machine, Muireann Bradley and Fulu Miziki are some of the global names in a typically packed line-up in the Brecon Beacons.
greenman.net

August 15-18
Purbeck Valley Folk Festival
Purbeck Valley Farm, Dorset
purbeckvalleyfolkfestival.co.uk

August 15-18
We Out Here
Wimborne St Giles, Dorset
weoutherefestival.com

August 16-18
FolkEast
Glemham Hall, Suffolk
In its 12th year, this most easterly of festivals has itself a fantastic line-up to celebrate its growing reputation as an indisputable folk attraction. Across five stages, artists of the calibre of Martin Carthy (with Jon Wilks), the Angeline Morrison Band, Jim Moray and Bellowhead's Sam Sweeney will be performing to a passionate crowd. Festival patron and The Young'Uns' Sean Cooney will join Sam Carter to premiere a new suite of songs about Peterloo, and Orcadian Kris Drever will attend with his exquisite band.
folkeast.co.uk

August 16-18
Beautiful Days
Escot Park, Ottery St Mary, Devon
beautifuldays.org

August 17-23
Whitby Folk Week
Whitby, North Yorkshire
whitbyfolk.co.uk

August 21-25
Mull of Kintyre Music Festival
Campbeltown, Argyll and Bute
mokfest.com

August 22-26
Cornwall Folk Festival
Wadebridge, Cornwall
cornwallfolkfestival.com

August 22-25
Shambala
Secret location, Northamptonshire
This vibrant inclusive festival is one of the best of the summer, with a line-up that always shines. With family vibes during the day and multicoloured parties at night, global artists abound. Frafra gospel star Florence Adooni, reggae legends The Congos, Palestinian violinist Akram Abdulfattah, Leyla McCalla, Franco-Colombian party starter Ëda Diaz, Zimbabwe's hottest group Mokoomba and the intense Iranian percussionist Mohammad Reza Mortazavi are just some of the incredible artists performing.
shambalafestival.org

Cambridge Folk Festival

Andrew Perry.

Severn Stage at Shrewsbury Folk Festival

Steve Lacey

August 23-26
Towersey Festival
Claydon Estate, Buckinghamshire
Towersey are celebrating 60 years of existence. Remarkably, the festival is still being run by the same family, the grandchildren of its founder now in charge. And though they've relocated from Towersey in Oxfordshire to Claydon Estate in Bucks, the spirit remains. Billy Bragg, The Staves and Seth Lakeman are the big draws, along with Oysterband, Pokey LaFarge, Katherine Priddy and the London African Gospel Choir offering up their take on Paul Simon's *Graceland*.
towerseyfestival.com

August 23-26
Shrewsbury Folk Festival
West Midlands Showground, Shropshire
There is plenty of 'Wow!' factor this year with South African legends Ladysmith Black Mambazo joining Jacqui McShee's Pentangle and US singer-songwriter Beth Nielsen Chapman among the headliners. This riverside festival also hosts Grammy-nominated Mary Gauthier, the Peatbog Faeries, Catalonian folk group El Pony Pisador, Sidiki Jobarteh Trio and Kathryn Tickell & The Darkening. The social dance line-up is led by a rare *ceilidh* performance from folk duo Spiers & Boden and plenty of food, beers and craft stalls.
shrewsburyfolkfestival.co.uk

August 30 – September 1
The British Country Music Festival
Winter Gardens, Blackpool
britishcountrymusicfestival.com

August 30 – September 1
Moseley Folk & Arts Festival
Moseley Park, Birmingham
moseleyfolk.co.uk

August 30 – September 1
Supersonic Festival
Birmingham
Brìghde Chaimbeul, ØXN, MC Yallah & Debmaster, John Francis Flynn, Mohammad Syfkhan, Senyawa and One Leg One Eye are just some of the visionary names on offer.
supersonicfestival.com

September 5-8
Bromyard Folk Festival
Bromyard, Herefordshire
bromyardfolkfestival.co.uk

September 13-15
Little Orchard Cider & Music Festival
Penhallow, Cornwall
cornwallciderfestival.co.uk

September 14-28
St Ives September Festival
St Ives, Cornwall
stivesseptemberfestival.co.uk

September 15
Jazz Cafe Festival
Burgess Park, London
Nils Frahm is the big headline act but there are some interesting names here – Buena Vista All Stars, Habibi Funk, Omar Souleyman, Gilles Peterson, to mention but a few – just as you'd expect from the Jazz Cafe's penchant for global artists. With four stages across one day it's going to be a busy one.
thejazzcafelondon.com/event/jazz-cafe-festival

September 21
Malmesbury Folk & Roots
Malmesbury, Wiltshire
malmesburyfolkroots.org

September 20-22
Southdowns Folk Festival
Bognor Regis, West Sussex
southdownsfolkfest.co.uk

October 11-13
Derby Folk Festival
Cathedral Quarter, Derby, Derbyshire
derbyfolkfestival.co.uk

October 11-13
Harwich International Shanty Festival
Harwich, Essex
harwichshantyfestival.co.uk

ART OF NOISE

Belgian trio **Avalanche Kaito**, led by Burkinabé *griot* Kaito Winse, have driven their post-punk assaults to combustible extremes on their latest album. "There is rhythm, there is noise, the sound of the texture is crazy," they tell ***Martin Longley***

Brussels-based Avalanche Kaito represent fusion at its most extreme, without resorting to dilution. Acoustic, folkloric traditions of Burkina Faso collide with the most extreme manifestations of avant-rock and brutal electronics. So often, historically, Afro-rock fusions have chosen bland pop as a base, but Avalanche Kaito have plunged into an alarmingly kinetic crossover of styles.

The name Avalanche Kaito unites Kaito Winse (vocals, *tama* talking drum, *peul* flute), Nico Gitto (guitar) and Benjamin Chaval (drums, digital manipulations). Winse hails from Burkina Faso, Chaval is French but lived in Brussels for a decade before recently shifting to Montpellier, while Gitto is from Brussels itself. Their central concept unites the very traditionally styled one-man-band songs of Kaito with radically spiky, collaged, heavy electro-rock. Their latest (and most striking) album *Talitakum* sometimes offers stretches of

All photos: Avalanche Kaito performing at the live music venue Merleyn, in the Netherlands

quieter minimalism, but mostly propels and careens in a near-uncontrollable sonic rampage. Despite the onslaught, Kaito's acoustic qualities are preserved in the mix. Chaval is skilled at studio-sculpting this complex range of audio input.

Kaito released his solo debut album, *Kaladounia*, in 2020 on the Rebel Up! label. This is run by DJ Seb Bassleer, who is extremely active on the Brussels scene, promoting gigs and appearing on shows broadcast by [online community radio and streaming platform] Kiosk. Bassleer recalls how Kaito arrived in Brussels: "That's quite a sweet story," he says. "It was actually through a French friend of mine who lives here... In 2018 she went to an African spoken word festival in Benin (Rencontres Internationales des Arts de l'Oralité), where she met Kaito as a performer when he was still living in Burkina Faso. She told me about his amazing *griot* music performance, and soon after she brought him to Brussels for a first-time solo tour, and as part of the short-lived band Le Jour du Seigneur."

Chaval was a member of this band, so the foundation of Avalanche Kaito was built. "It was here in a small venue where I saw Kaito play for the first time," Bassleer continues. "His solo performance radiated so much sincere energy, griot spirituality and musical uniqueness, that it took me completely by surprise. I clicked with Kaito from the start and cited my big interest in recording his debut album."

Bassleer organised a recording session with Aymeric de Tapol at the NGHE Médiathèque, a DIY art space and free music library in an old workshop building in the heart of the Molenbeek borough. Chaval continues the tale: "He arrived in Brussels and we did a five-day rehearsal. It went very fast and very easy, mixing up some noisy free jazz and some traditional music from Burkina Faso. Then we had maybe 15 gigs in France, Germany, Switzerland and Belgium." Following a few zig-zags between Belgium and Burkina Faso, they recorded the first Avalanche Kaito album in 2020. Gigs resumed, post-lockdown, and they hooked up with guitarist Gitto, with whom they had an instant rapport. "Brussels is a big nexus," says Chaval. "There's a crazy underground scene. There were three concerts a week organised, and a lot of space to rehearse. We play loud with Kaito – I mean, they play loud like crazy in his [home] village – so there was no question, that was the connection. There is rhythm, there is noise, for sure, the sound of the texture is crazy. For example, the flute he plays, the peul, it's full of noise, full of breath, with this white noise inside. We play the same kind of shit, even though it's not from the same place."

It sounds like improvisational get-togethers might form the heart of their songs, but this is not necessarily the case. "There is not only one method," Chaval explains. "But most of the time, 70%, Kaito brings the songs, and then he suggests the rhythm. Then we jam, that's the basic process. But there is also the production process. Sometimes we record, then I take it and add stuff, cut stuff, make something, and then we have to play it back." Upcoming gigs will feature five new songs, which the trio will reconstruct from these recorded versions.

"It was all new experience," Kaito recalls. "New energy, new musical inspiration and new sounds. It was very interesting. Before, I was very much in my world of traditional music. It's thanks to Belgium and the team I work with, that I've discovered so many different kinds of music. It's a great experience for me. At first, I am surprised by everything. It's a nice surprise to hear the sound in Ben's machines and Nico's pedal sounds, as well as in the recording studio. For instance, everything in a piece like 'Machine (The Mill)' is new to me."

"IT WAS ALL NEW EXPERIENCE... NEW ENERGY, NEW MUSICAL INSPIRATION AND NEW SOUNDS"

Gitto is also positive: "I felt very excited and honoured to be able to work with musicians like Kaito and Benjamin. I had just met Kaito a short time before, at an alternative venue in Brussels where musicians from the underground scene could practise, play gigs and meet. We immediately hit it off and started working together, making music with our different backgrounds and telling each other our stories. I also knew Benjamin from the powerful and atypical Brussels music scene. I was certain that I wanted to immerse myself in the rhythmic and experimental challenge that was about to unfold before us. They needed a musician to interpret Avalanche Kaito's first album on stage and, of course, I immediately agreed to cross swords with these two beautiful people from incredible worlds."

He has a very instinctive approach to the guitar: "I'm absolutely not a music theorist. In fact, I know absolutely nothing about that side of music. For some time now, I've been learning about the different rhythms possible on this planet, and the use of effects to create a maximum of timbres and textures. Nevertheless, I've always been passionate about sound, its power and the effect it has on our souls. It seems to me that I first envision a guitar part through the gesture, and the emotion and power follow through the body. Then it seems to touch the heart of the audience. There's something spiritual, something alive in the instrument that allows us to go beyond ourselves..."

Talitakum represents a significant advancement of the Avalanche Kaito sound, as the members refine their communication, and hone themselves on the live stage, with 2024 looking set to increase their club and festival appearances and expose their full power to a rapidly increasing audience. ◆

Bram Versteeg

***+ Talitakum** is a Top of the World this issue, see p70. 'Tanvusse' appears on our compilation, track 4*

*Re:*TRADITION

Simon Broughton reports on a Lublin festival with roots dating back to the 15th century, which continues to bring together Polish, Belarusian and Ukrainian identities and traditions

The audience are on their feet almost as soon as Janusz Prusinowski picks up his violin and is joined by clarinet, trumpet, cello and a frame drum sounding the sophisticated triple-beat *mazurka*. The Janusz Prusinowski Kompania are on a large open stage, there's adance area in front, filling up fast with whirling figures, and several hundred seats for listening – although many are now vacated to join the dance. This is a festival where people are very ready to get involved.

The Janusz Prusinowski Kompania have led the revival of traditional music in Poland for many years. There's an irresistible vivacity and drive in their music as different instrumentalists take the lead. Their repertoire is essentially that of central Poland, yet here at the Re:tradycja festival in Lublin, the focus is on the east of the country and beyond.

When I first looked over the programme for last year's festival, I'd assumed that the profusion of bands playing music from eastern Poland, Ukraine and Belarus was a response to the Ukraine war – in which Poland has been active in welcoming refugees, giving military support and humanitarian aid. But organisers Agata Turczyn and Karolina Waszczuk insisted this was the idea from the outset. "Since the beginning 17 years ago, the festival has been about connecting Poland, Belarus and Ukraine," said Turczyn. "We are neighbours, so it's natural for us to connect. We want to show that traditional art and culture has no borders."

> **"We are neighbours, so it's natural for us to connect… to show art and culture has no borders"**

Lublin is the biggest and one of the most attractive cities in eastern Poland. There's a picturesque old town with winding streets, painted buildings and a market square. During the 15th and 16th centuries, the large trade fairs of the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth were held in Lublin. And harking back to those days, a traditional crafts market, the biggest in Poland, called the Jagiellonian Fair (Jarmark Jagielloński) was started over a decade ago. They switched their name to Re:tradycja a couple of years ago to make people more aware of the music in the mix.

During the three days of the free festival, the old town was a riot of colour with narrow streets, squares and a marketplace packed with stalls. There were paintings, carvings, embroidery, lace, straw ornaments, paper cutouts, musical instruments and more. "Straw ornaments were an important way to decorate the house," explained Waszczuk. "And they are very cheap to make. Along with paper cut-outs, again a cheap material. If you don't have enough money to buy a beautiful painting you can do a paper cut-out and show your family it's a special time." Those who have seen the recent animated feature *The Peasants*, an adaptation of Władysław Reymont's Nobel Prize-winning depiction of Polish rural life, will have noticed that the main character spends much time cutting out paper decorations. "We like people who make these objects, not only selling them," said Waszczuk, "People who can pass the traditions on because we organise workshops. They are masters of these crafts."

One of the bands I was most keen to see was Hajda Banda, a pretty new group who specialise in the music of Podlasie, an area of eastern Poland, Belarus and Ukraine, exactly the zone of interest of this festival. The six-piece group, led by Minsk-born violinist and singer Daria Butskaya, performed songs gathered during her research and learned from regional musicians. The sound was enhanced by two violins beautifully intertwining, a rattling *cimbalom* and dynamic percussion. A lot of the songs were polyphonic, which is not common in Polish traditional music but increasingly so as you move east. As well as a powerful concert onstage, they also played a session on Grodzka, the pedestrianised main street of the old city.

Another intriguing band performing in one of the churches of the old town was Wernyhora, a trio from Sanok in the southeast. They were more classical in mood, with a female vocalist, violin and viol player, plus hurdy-gurdy, playing music from the Carpathian borderlands of Poland and Ukraine, much of it sourced from the Boyko people whose beautiful Ukrainian-Greek Orthodox wooden churches you can find dotted across southeast Poland.

The four-piece Kapela Batareja (violin, cimbalom, accordion and percussion) also explored music from the eastern borderlands, and were a rather fine party band with lots of circle and spinning dances. They included several Jewish tunes, a reminder of Lublin's disappeared population. Jews first settled in Lublin in the Middle Ages: in the 16th century there were two Hebrew printing presses and, when World War II was declared in 1939, there were seven synagogues. At that point, Lublin had a Jewish population of 45,000 (over 30%), the vast majority of whom were killed by the Nazis. Majdanek concentration camp is on the city's outskirts. It's a powerful memorial.

As well as the Polish bands there were several international guests. These include Estonian duo Puuluup, who seem to be at every other festival these days. Impressively, one of them, Marko Veisson, had learned how to introduce many of their songs in Polish, a language he doesn't speak. And the Re:tradycja audience were very up for doing Estonian dancing and a long conga through the open area in front of the stage.

The other guests were Romanian duo Balkan Taksim, who mixed traditional instrumentals with electronic beats. Sașa-Liviu Stoianovici played the lute, while Alin Zăbrăuțeanu was the keyboard and electronics wizard. "This is a Romanian *cobza*," said Stoianovici, as he held up his instrument. "They still play it in eastern Romania and they play it like a machine-gun." They gave a refreshing new take on Balkan music, though I felt the crowd here – and certainly the dancers – were more traditional in their tastes. Re:tradycja is a strong statement of eastern Poland's identity. ◆

+ Re:tradycja *is taking place in Lublin, Poland from August 23-25. More info at retradycja.eu*

Opposite: Hajda Banda's Daria Butskaya; Lublin

Below (top to bottom): Hajda Banda; The Janusz Prusinowski Kompania

Simon Broughton

Reviews

We review full-length world music, roots and folk albums (not singles or EPs), available on CD, digital or vinyl.
Please note we only accept digital submissions. Email details of albums to reviews@songlines.co.uk for consideration

Africa *50*
Americas *54*
Europe *58*
Asia & Pacific *66*
Middle East *68*
Fusion *70*

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FEATURED ALBUM

Mdou Moctar
Funeral for Justice

Matador Records

★★★★☆

Forget desert blues. Mdou Moctar insist they are a rock band, influenced by Jimi Hendrix and Van Halen as much as by their Touareg roots. They are led by the lead guitarist and singer who gives the band their name (and is otherwise known as Mahamadou Souleymane). Born in a little Saharan desert village in Niger, he made his first guitar from a piece of wood and bicycle brake wire. His first recordings back in 2008 spread across North Africa via Bluetooth swaps on mobile phone cards, and one of those songs appeared on the compilation *Music from Saharan Cellphones*. He went on to star in a Saharan homage to Prince's *Purple Rain*. Now he plays lead guitar on a white left-handed Stratocaster, leading a band in which he is joined by rhythm guitar, drums and bass, the last played by New York producer Mikey Coltun.

Following the success of their sixth album, *Afrique Victime*, now comes a (mostly) intense, high energy set with angry political lyrics in the Touareg language, Tamasheq. The opening title-track sets the mood with urgent vocals and rapid-fire guitar riffs, the lyrics calling on African leaders to '*retake control of your countries, rich in resources.*' The band settle down for the slinky, rhythmic opening to 'Imouhar', which is a call for the preservation of Tamasheq, at a time when Mdou argues that many people in his community are just speaking French. The song provides a reminder that they share musical roots with Tinariwen, from across the desert in Mali – at least until the rock riffs kick in. Elsewhere, on 'Sousoume Tamacheq', he deals with the problems of the nomadic Touareg, again with furious vocals and guitar work underpinned by a solid rhythm section and Coltun's tight bass work.

Much anger is directed at France, the former colonial power that has continued to have close links with Niger, though French troops left the country (after this album was recorded) following last year's military coup. France is dependent on Niger's uranium for its nuclear power programme, and on 'Oh France' Moctar admonishes the country. He continues with the theme on 'Modern Slaves', though this returns to a gentler, slinky style.

This is a band who spend a massive amount of time playing live, and they are back on the road now, with a lengthy tour of the US and Europe. They will be in London at Electric Brixton on July 3, and then back in the UK from August 30 until September 4. They will be well worth checking out.

ROBIN DENSELOW

TRACK TO TRY *Oh France*

Equal Spirits
Wise and Waiting

Ubuntu Music / ECN Music

★★★☆☆

Wise and Waiting is Bristol-based trombonist Raph Clarkson's latest exploration into the vibrant sounds of South African jazz. Following recent successes with his 15-piece orchestra, Dissolute Society, this album, released with Ubuntu and ECN music is Clarkson's first release with his new group, Equal Spirits. Excelling as a bandleader and arranger, Clarkson here brings together a diverse ensemble of 24 musicians hailing from the UK and South Africa. The South African musicians feature most prominently, with stellar contributions from vocalists Yonela Mnana, Nosihe Zulu and NoZaka, alongside tasteful accompaniment from drummer Siphiwe Shiburi. Nigerian-born Johannesburg-based bassist Amaeshi Ikechi also deserves highlighting.

South African jazz has a distinctive vibrancy, and this album is infused with the percussive energy and joyful harmonies pioneered by legends of the genre such as Abdullah Ibrahim and Dudu Pukwana. Equal Spirits decorate this with a few modern touches, including electronic sampling by Elliot Galvin. Spoken word poetry takes the spotlight on 'Closing' and 'Phezulu, Ezulwini', and a myriad of languages – Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Yoruba, Arabic and English – all resoundingly echo the political themes of anti-apartheid resistance and anti-colonialism. Vocal choruses and strings emerge during the second half of *Wise and Waiting* and add a textural expansiveness to the finale, 'Travail'. Equal Spirits have produced a wonderful celebration of the interconnected musical heritage of Europe, America and South Africa.

TOM SPARGO

TRACK TO TRY *Back Again*

Q&A

Mdou Moctar bassist, Mikey Coltun

How did you first hear Mdou Moctar?
I was sent field recordings of Mdou (which was the *Afelen* album on Sahel Sounds) from a friend and was hooked!

What excited you about his playing?
Similar to the other Niger Touareg music I was listening to, there was this rawness and energy that was familiar to me growing up in the DIY/punk world in Washington DC.

How did you become a member of the band?
It was on the first Mdou Moctar US tour in 2017 that I was asked to drive and do some tour managing on a New York show. Mdou found out I played bass and on the way to the show he said, 'you're gonna play with us tonight.' I borrowed a bass for that show and I remember Mdou looking back at me smiling. He then asked me to manage the band, and then asked me to come to Niger with him.

You spend a massive amount of time on tour. How important is that for the band?
Touring is the most important thing for the Mdou Moctar band. Since we all live in different parts, Ahmoudou and Souleymane in Agadez, Niger, Mdou in Tahoua, Niger and myself in New York, touring is a way for us to write music.

Where are your biggest audiences right now?
New York seems to be a big crowd for us. We recently played at Central Park for over 4,000 people; Los Angeles and London too.

Ebru Yildiz

Jembaa Groove
Ye Ankasa | We Ourselves
Agogo Records

★★★★½

Jembaa Groove's 2022 debut album was a highlife highlight (a *Top of the World* in #177). The Berlin-based group elegantly develop their formula on *Ye Ankasa* by dialling up their jazzier influences. The recording retains the hallmarks of highlife. High-pitched organ chops propel 'Asem Ben', and the guitar patterns on 'Dabia' and 'Sweet My Ear (feat K.O.G)' possess a telegram-like rhythmic tick that offsets the groove.

A little of the grit of highlife in its heyday is sifted out through the group's soulful horn lines and gentle vocal harmonies. Some more spikiness might have aided the laid-back groove of 'Makoma' in its pairing with the fiery anti-colonial sentiments of Ghana's first President Kwame Nkrumah.

The band's intention is not to imitate however but to evolve. *Ye Ankasa* tacks much closer to jazz than its predecessor. 'Namo' approaches *Bitches Brew*-era Miles Davis and 'Outro' faintly recalls David Bowie's latter day jazz experimentations with saxophonist Donny McCaslin. 'Ewiase' holds the group's influences in a compelling balance with meditative keys underpinning earworm synth and intricate guitar. An original and accomplished fusion.

LIAM IZOD

TRACK TO TRY *Ewiase*

Odd Okoddo
Negore
Altin Village & Mine

★★½☆☆

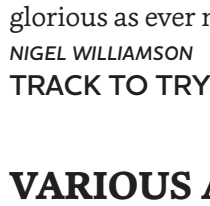
Odd Okoddo is Kenyan singer Olith Ratego and German multi-instrumentalist Sven Kacirek, working in Nairobi, and here delivering their second album. Ratego records vocals and *okodo* (lyre) and Kacirek subsequently layers marimba, keyboards and beats. Ratego has built the okodo, his own instrument, which is based on the traditional *nyatiti*. These songs are descended from the *dodo* music of the Luo people. The sessions have a skeletal feel that's almost demo-esque, and Ratego doesn't have the most appealing of voices, with a flattish edge, with something of a lacklustre feel. 'Ochuya' has a good-beat vibe, with some choral voice thickening, while Angel Bat Dawid guests on 'Timneyore', playing clarinet. KMRU appears on 'Kongeya', which has a positive, twinkling atmosphere, an ambient orientation. 'Nyeri Gi' benefits from a refreshingly swift pace, but on 'Osugana' Ratego's vocals become particularly fatiguing. The lyre is not exactly up in the mix, but is best heard on the closing 'Ninuwang'.

MARTIN LONGLEY

TRACK TO TRY *Nyeri Gi*

Rail Band
Rail Band
Mississippi Records

★★★★★



Of all the dance bands to come out of West Africa in the first, fertile flush of post-colonialism in the 1960s and 1970s, Mali's Rail Band rank among the very finest. Formed in 1970 as '*the official orchestra of the Malian State Railway*,' the Rail Band played most nights of the week until the early hours of the morning at the Buffet Hotel de la Gare at Bamako's central railway station. The group's self-titled 1973 album, which now gets a welcome remastered re-release on the enterprising Mississippi label (although they operate out of Oregon), is an all-time classic of its kind. Led by trumpeter and sax player Tidiani Koné, the horn section sizzles and the reverb-drenched guitar lines of Djelimady Tounkara soar over a simmering blend of jazz, Afro-Cuban rhythms and Mandé tradition. As for vocalists, we're spoilt for choice with Salif Keita, Mory Kanté and Magan Ganessy all singing on the only album on which they appeared together. There are no extras or bonus tracks – just 45 minutes of timeless music that still sounds as glorious as ever more than 40 years on.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

TRACK TO TRY *Duga*

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Congo Funk! Sound Madness from the Shores of the Mighty Congo River (Kinshasa/Brazzaville 1969-1982)
Analog Africa

★★★★½

A simplified history of music during the period dubbed *L'Authenticité* in the Congo shows a period of heavily state-funded and sanctioned music production, aimed to homogenise the cultural identity of the nation, at that time called Zaire, and centre it around President Mobutu Sese Seko's own ideas of what that should look and sound like in its post-colonial era.

This was a period which birthed some titans of Congolese rumba, *soukous* and *son*, many of which feature on this extended record: Tabu Ley, Franco and more. So, synthesising a coherent and unique compilation from this period, arguably one of the most prolific moments of musical creation in the region's history, was not going to be an easy task.

Congo Funk! is a tour de force of ineffably enticing grooves, jubilant brass melodies and open harmonies that are typical of this music. It also balances the raw and energetic with the luscious and refined sides of rumba from that period – such as in the transition from 'Kiwita Kumunani' by Orchestre O.K. Jazz into G.O. Malebo's 'Fiancée Laya'. The distorted lead guitar from Orchestre's leader, Franco, in tandem with his growling voice stands stark when compared to the soft lullabies of G.O. Malebo as they commence 'Fiancée Laya'. It always surprises and always pleases.

NIK HANN

TRACK TO TRY *Lalia* by Trio Bydoli

TOP OF THE WORLD TRACK 3

Asmâa Hamzaoui & Bnat Timbouktou
L'Bnat
ajabu!

★★★★½

The second album by Gnawa *maalma* Asmâa Hamzaoui and her all-female group Daughters of Timbuktu is a bass-lute thudding, *qaraqab*-clattering, *tagnawit* (Gnawa-ness) flexing tour de force. One of two daughters born to renowned Casablanca *maalem* Rachid Hamzaoui, Asmâa grew up immersed in the music and healing rituals of Morocco's Gnawa Sufi brotherhoods, absorbing a tradition that melds elements of West African, Arabic and Amazigh (Berber) cultures – and whose practitioners are almost exclusively male. As her 2019 debut *Oulad Lghaba* (Children of the Forest) demonstrated, Asmâa and her group – which includes elder sister Aicha Hamzaoui on vocals and qaraqab – challenged the Maghreb patriarchy with a finesse since further polished with international tours and headline slots. *L'Bnat* (Daughter) finds Hamzaoui wielding her wood-and-goatskin *gimbri*, her living instrument, in ways fiercer and tighter while still sounding wild and free. Producer Andreas Unge again wisely stays hands off, allowing all ten fusion-free tracks to pulse with a sort of organic spirituality lent further agency by Hamzaoui's astoundingly rich, impassioned alto and the calls-and-responses, sometimes measured, sometimes frenzied, of her band. With nine tracks titled with the prefix 'Lalla' (an Amazigh address for women) to celebrate women and a tenth bonus track honouring the late great Gnawa maalem Mahmoud Gania, this is powerful, transporting stuff.

JANE CORNWELL

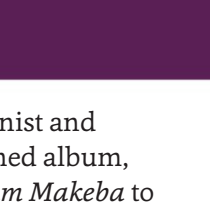
TRACK TO TRY *Lalla Rkia*

Ben Abbou

Tidiane Thiam
Africa Yontii

Sahel Sounds

★★★★½



This is the second instrumental album for Sahel Sounds by the Senegalese guitarist from Baaba Maal's home town of Podor and it's a significant advance on 2020's *Siftorde*. That record was recorded at Tidiane's home with a single microphone and the crickets chirping in the background, but this studio set has a much more produced feel, with hip-hop beat maker Ndiaye Moctar providing layers of electronic sound on several tracks. The title translates as 'Africa, It's Time' in Pulaar and although one well-known rock journalist has likened Tidiane to Ali Farka Touré, in truth, his style and the tradition on which he draws are quite different from the late, great Malian's sound and have more in common with Baaba Maal's long time friend, the guitarist Mansour Seck. Indeed, the playing on several tracks such as 'Nanka' and 'Too' reminds one of the acoustic folk guitar album *Djam Leelii* which Maal and Seck made together in the 1980s. Weaving traditional and original melodies together, this is guitar playing at its most elegant and stately with plenty of surprises, such as 'Yangue' on which there's a felicitous echo of Jerry Garcia and the Grateful Dead.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

TOP OF THE WORLD TRACK 2

TRACK TO TRY *Yangue*

AFRICA IN MOTION *DISPATCHES FROM AFRICA AND ITS DIASPORA*

By Chinonso Ihekire

LAGOS – The air stood still as **Somi Kakoma** waltzed towards the stage. Her hair, knotted in braids, dangled across her shoulders like the suspense resting on the crowd. Otis Brown III, her longtime drummer, ushered her solemn vocals in with gentle jazz percussion. The 42-year-old Grammy-nominated *chanteuse* of Ugandan, Rwandan and American heritage showed the same flare for cultural unification and activism that has powered her 21-year career so far. Her live performance opened the *Fabric of Courage* exhibition (April 8-14) at the historic Old Printing Press, a project born out of Soma's research into the Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) that took place in Nigeria in 1977. For the show, she teamed up with Marilyn Nance, the veteran US photographer, to exhibit hundreds of Nance's images of the original festival which have been compiled in Nance's recent book, *Last Day in Lagos*. With her guitarist, pianist and drummer, Somi brought her acclaimed album, *Zenzile: The Re-imagination of Miriam Makeba* to life that breezy Sunday afternoon. From tongue clicks to ululated bursts, she matched the gyration on songs like 'Hapo Zamani' to the melancholy of 'Holy Room', a song from a previous album which she wrote as a tribute to the Rwandan genocide of 1994. Somi's obsession with Miriam Makeba, the late Grammy-winning South African singer, led her to FESTAC '77, which Makeba sparked to life with renditions of her activism-laden discography. And with *Fabric of Courage*, Somi shone a light on a forgotten time in African existence, when the arts united hearts. Right in the heart of Lagos, where FESTAC was held, she set the stage ablaze with her melodies and messages, calling for the revival of a celebration of Black culture and experience, and a deepening of pan-African ties.

Somi Kakoma at *Fabric of Courage*'s opening event

JOHANNESBURG – Thousands of booze-drinking youths swarmed the Old Park Station in Newtown, Johannesburg in early April, for the fifth edition of **Cottonfest**. The 'cotton eaters' gyrated, despite a brief rainfall, to the eclectic mix of hip-hop and *amapiano* that has soundtracked the festival since its inception. Major League DJz, one of the country's leading DJ duos, played a lengthy amapiano set, marking their first appearance since the festival's founder – Rikhado 'Riky Rick' Makhado, a cousin to the twin DJs – died in 2022. The event has since continued through Riky Rick's wife, Bianca Naidoo, and has contributed to South Africa's rising amapiano culture.

RISING STAR – 17-year-old **Qing Madi** is as exceptional as it gets. The Nigerian songbird became a viral Tiktok sensation circa 2022 when her first single 'See Finish' became a viral hit on TikTok. Born Chimamanda Pearl Chukwuma, the singer's lithe vocals and bohemian poetry have attracted a growing community of music lovers across West and East Africa, where her recent self-titled debut album has continued to make waves. With songs like 'American Love', and the BNXN-assisted 'Ole', Madi swerves through tensions with the grace of Jorja Smith. Her cadences and pitch weave patterns of emotions that prick one to reflect deeply before the song crescendos. With her silky voice, she's proving to be a beacon of hope for girls who aspire to stardom in a male-laden field. "I want people that are from where I'm from, and people that are not even from where I'm from, to be able to see possibilities and not to just see the end of the road," she tells *Songlines*. If her silky voice and ambitious discography are anything to go by, it seems certain that future releases with her label JTON Music will propel her towards her dreams as she continues on her courageous path.

Adelina Sasnauskaitė

FEATURED REISSUE

The Jazzanians
We Have Waited Too Long
Ubuntu Music
★★★★½

At the height of apartheid in 1983, Darius Brubeck, son of the legendary jazz giant Dave Brubeck and an accomplished jazz pianist in his own right, took the bold step of moving with his wife Catherine from the US to South Africa, where they established the first multi-cultural university jazz education programme on the African continent at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Working with impoverished students they defied academic bureaucracy and the repression of the apartheid state to make a vital contribution to South African music and to the cultural and material lives of hundreds of young artists.

In total the Brubecks created five multi-racial bands during apartheid, the most notable of which was The Jazzanians, with a line-up of Melvin Peters (piano), Johnny Mekoa (trumpet), Zim Ngqawana (alto sax/flute), Nic Paton (tenor & soprano sax), Andrew Eagle (guitar), Victor Masondo (bass) and Lulu Gontsana (drums and percussion).

Before recording the album *We Have Waited Too Long* under Brubeck's direction, the ensemble toured America where they appeared on national television, signposting the way to the Rainbow Nation and the democratic direction a post-apartheid South Africa would soon take.

Brubeck describes the recording of *We Have Waited Too Long* as "a jubilant expression of the creative interaction apartheid tried to stifle" and on its welcome reissue it still sounds like a potent and infectious landmark in South African jazz.

The seven tracks on The Jazzanians' album are all original compositions, from the opener 'Bayete', with its swinging township rhythms and Zulu guitar licks to the closer 'Se Hamba Nabo' (We Go Together) which features some wonderfully burnished trumpet playing from Mekoa of which the mighty Hugh Masekela himself would have been proud.

Elsewhere the horns are gorgeously layered, the rhythm section dynamic and the solos tight and melodic while two softer pieces, the lyrical 'Peace Meal' and the title-track, with its cosmic flute trilling from Ngqawana, offer light and shade.

Several of the musicians Brubeck mentored in The Jazzanians continued to play with him, Gontsana joining Rachabane and Victor Ntoni (bass) in Brubeck's group Afro Cool Concept, while Ngqawana co-composed with Brubeck a suite setting to music speeches by Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu which was commissioned in 2004 by Jazz at Lincoln Center. Ngqawana, Gontsana and Mekoa have since died but most of the other Jazzanians remain professional working musicians to this day.

The album's reissue is accompanied by the publication of a book, *Playing the Changes,* in which Darius and Catherine Brubeck chronicle their years in South Africa, and a forthcoming documentary film of the same name.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

TRACK TO TRY *Bayete*

Ted Brien

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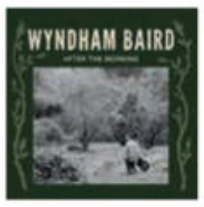
Wyndham Baird
After the Morning

Jalopy Records

★★★☆☆



Wyndham Baird's music lives at the intersection of witting imitation, authentic reinterpretation and inspired creation. He sings like his (mostly) American folk heroes, primarily Bob Dylan, with a dash of Jimmie Rodgers and a pinch of Woody Guthrie. His debut album, *After the Morning*, offers up a banquet of 13 chestnuts from the classic folk repertoire by the likes of Rodgers ('Waiting for a Train'), Eric Von Schmidt ('Joshua Gone Barbados') and The Carter Family ('The Girl on the Greenbriar Shore'). Outlier numbers include Merle Haggard's 'If We Make It through December' and Randy Newman's 'She Chose Me', originally composed for, of all things, *Cop Rock*, a television series from 1990. Wyndham's dexterous guitar picking and scratchy Dylanesque delivery are particularly effective on 'The House Carpenter', imbuing the timeless ballad about demonic meddling with an appropriately anxious, if not wholly creepy, hue. Joining Wyndham on harmony singing is Samoa Wilson on 'Meet Me by the Moonlight, Alone'. Her old-timey style fits the material like a dovetail joint while folk musician and producer Eli Smith lends his considerable skills on banjo and autoharp.

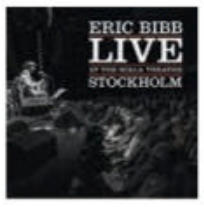
DOUG DELOACH

TRACK TO TRY *The House Carpenter*

Eric Bibb
Live at the Scala Theatre Stockholm

Repute

★★★☆☆



It wouldn't be exaggerating to call singer/guitarist Eric Bibb, son of activist, actor and folk singer, Leon Bibb, now five decades into his own career, folk-blues royalty. Certainly, there's a regal vibe to this smoothly assured live set recorded in front of an appreciative Scandinavian audience in 2023.

Bibb's finger-picking is melodious and precise, and his voice is soft and inviting with comforting inflections that feel just right and even, at times, showcasing a hint of Taj Mahal's soulful croon. He's ably assisted by a large ensemble including long-time collaborator Glen Scott and a troupe of local musicians who do a bang-up job of evoking authentic Americana. On the footloose opener, 'Goin' Down The Road Feelin' Bad', Greger Andersson blows an old-timey harmonica while Johan Lindström teases gorgeous pedal steel swoops and Esbjörn Hazelius' fiddle is a yearning sigh.

There are some grittier moments – 'Sliver Spoon' is a crawling autobiographical growl about being '*born to sing the blues*,' and 'Things is 'bout Comin' My Way' is a laconic variant on the classic 'Sittin' on Top of the World', with the fiddle nodding towards Sugarcane Harris' tart yowl – but, for the most part, it's a warm bath for the ears.

DANIEL SPICER

TRACK TO TRY *Goin' Down the Road Feelin' Bad*

Yann Falquet

La Chicana
Los Lobos del Recuerdo

Acqua Records

★★★★☆

Lobos is one of those Buenos Aires province backwater towns where nothing much happens, ever. It may be an accidental allusion, but it's just the sort of place where La Chicana would be ideal headliners at a general-store gig for an assortment of smartphone-wielding *gauchos*, ersatz *estancieros* and *gringos tangueros*. But the 'Wolves of Memory' of the title roam everywhere in Argentina, tearing into the past. What La Chicana have been doing for almost three decades is reframing and reworking Argentina's folk forms, mixing them up with global influences and resisting pigeonholes and the political compromise of the mainstream. On their tenth studio album, founding (and romantic) duo Dolores Solá and Acho Estol display their trademark eclecticism and indefatigable curiosity. 'Borracha' is a vivacious fiddle-led ditty akin to a reel. 'Crisálida' – penned by Solá – is a waltz channelling a tango mood. 'Cuyanita' is a *chacarera*-inflected composition that recalls the Silvio/Sosa classic 'La Maza'. 'Pugni Chiusi' is a risky venture into 60s Italian balladeering. 'Para Verte Gambear' is a *candombe* dedicated to Maradona. La Chicana continue to dribble, dodge and score quality goals. Post-dictatorship Argentina has been a new kind of shitshow; this is its antidotal soundtrack.

CHRIS MOSS

TRACK TO TRY *Cuyanita*

EZRA
EZRA

Adhyâropa Records

★★★★★

With the eponymously titled *EZRA*, composer, multi-instrumentalist and luthier Jesse Jones establishes his acoustic ensemble as one of our planet's premier purveyors of progressive bluegrass. Inspired by genre-fluid aggregations, such as Punch Brothers, The Goat Rodeo Sessions and Uncommon Ritual, Jones offers up nine original compositions spanning the realms of folk, country, bluegrass, jazz and classical chamber music. While many bands attempt similar alchemical blends, EZRA are among the few that succeed in creating a truly magical synthesis. The band's core lineup – Jacob Jolliff (mandolin), Max Allard (banjo), Craig Butterfield (double bass) and Jones (guitar and piano) – are all superb, award-winning players and scholars, equally comfortable with the cool discipline of the academy and the rambunctious permissiveness of improvisation. 'Smoke in the Valley' rolls out in a blue groove, like a murder ballad, with Allard plucking the melody on banjo, followed by Butterfield's lilting double bass, Jones chiming in on guitar and

Paul Reitano; Drew Baron

Jolliff's jazzy mandolin. 'Contrabuffoon', another jazz-inflected tune, bops and swings with joyous charm. 'Jarrah', a sprightly tempoed, riff-trading showcase, was inspired by a deep red wood from Western Australia, from which Jones crafted a guitar, which he tunes like a banjo.

DOUG DELOACH

TRACK TO TRY *Contrabuffoon*

Yann Falquet
Les Secrets du Ciel

Yann Falquet

★★★★½

Yann Falquet is best-known as the singer and guitarist who co-founded the award-winning Québécois folk trio Genticorum, celebrated for their exhilarating fiddle and accordion work and stomping foot percussion. Now, after 23 years with the band, he has decided that it's time to release his first solo album, and show a very different approach. The aim is to '*adapt traditional folk into a modern dreamy folk universe*,' and he does so by re-working a series of French Canadian ballads. Singing in Québécois French he shows off his fine, relaxed and gently emotional voice and drifting, atmospheric acoustic guitar work, with subtle and elegant backing provided by violin, banjo, double bass, drums, pump organ and clarinet. The set is dominated by songs of travel and lost love, and 'La Rose' sets the mood with a story of parting and a reminder that love, like a rose garden, can't be nurtured from afar. Elsewhere, 'Courage' is the story of a soldier who abandons war for the pursuit of love, while the exquisite 'Les Mers et les Montagnes' is another bittersweet travelogue. There's one instrumental piece, the jaunty 'Sutherland's March', in which the backing musicians get a chance to dominate proceedings. A classy, finely performed set.

ROBIN DENSELOW

TRACK TO TRY *Les Mers et les Montagnes*

Sierra Ferrell
Trail of Flowers

Rounder Records

★★★½☆

Sierra Ferrell kicks off her latest album with 'American Dreaming', '*one of several songs co-written with… frequent collaborator Melody Walker (Molly Tuttle & Golden Highway, Della Mae).*' The song opens with the West Virginia-born, Nashville-based artist's distinctly sharp, frequently fluttering voice, describing the double-edged nature of working as a touring musician. '*If I could just get back home to pick up where we left off / I'd take better care of myself, I'd stop drinking from the bottom shelf / But my old wheels keep spinning.*' A full complement of luminous Nashville session musicians including Chris Scruggs and Lukas Nelson propel the music forward with the perfect mix of polished twang and pop country groove. At a whirling hootenanny pace, 'Fox Hunt' expresses Ferrell's yearning for the good ol' mountain life as well as her appreciation of old-time country music. With echoes of 'St James Infirmary', Ferrell's cover of Fiddlin' Arthur Smith's 'Chitlin' Cooking Time in Cheatham County' harkens to the singer's stints as a busker on the streets of New Orleans and Seattle. All in all, *Trail of Flowers* encapsulates the qualities that have catapulted Ferrell to the forefront of the country roots scene.

DOUG DELOACH

TRACK TO TRY *American Dreaming*

Los Guayabo Brothers
PsychoTropical

Los Guayabo Brothers

★★★★☆

Guayabo is Colombian slang for hungover, but it can also mean nostalgia for your homeland, the famous *saudade* in Portuguese, a feeling that this hybrid of Colombian, Chilean, Uruguayan and French members must be familiar with. The album *Psychotropical* was originally a crowdfunded project, for the very modest sum of €7,000, so you get a lot of bang for your Euro; drawn-out, percussive *cumbia*-based rhythms and punchy brass riffs combined with light rock and psychedelic guitar. Opening track 'Folkloríptica' is a busy mix of carnival rhythms including the *zouk* and *puya atlanticense*, and there's some enthusiastic guitar shredding on the celebratory 'La Conjuntivitis'. 'El Francer' incorporates the swinging salsa of the Fania All-Stars to describe France, the good and the bad, through the eyes of a newly arrived immigrant. The album's lead single 'Fango' combines cumbia and salsa Colombiana with light touches of guitars modulated to sound like Cuban *tres*, akin to a psychedelic highlife guitar sound that creates the psychotropical vibe of the album title. It's a highly infectious six-and-a-half minutes, and Los Guayabo Brothers really let the grooves breathe, with the brass punctuating the pounding percussion while everyone involved is obviously having a ball, never being far from the party that no doubt gives them their fateful hangover.

ANDY CUMMING

TRACK TO TRY *Fango*

Orkestar Kriminal
Originali

CPL-Music

★★★★☆

Orkestar Kriminal's evolution reaches a highpoint with *Originali*, their first album of entirely original compositions. Renowned for their renditions of historical criminal ballads, the Canadian eclectic klezmer ensemble ventures into uncharted territory while maintaining their signature improvisational flair.

Originali showcases the band's transition from interpreters to creators, as they infuse their distinct sound with a newfound authenticity. Despite the departure from traditional material, the album seamlessly retains the group's unmistakable presence and historic charm.

Through 12 compelling tracks, Orkestar Kriminal fearlessly explore diverse lingual landscapes, weaving narratives in Yiddish, Greek, Spanish and beyond. Collaborating with linguistic experts worldwide, they have crafted songs that transcend cultural boundaries, embracing a global tapestry of expression.

True to their roots, the band delves into themes of underworld intrigue and societal power dynamics. Through poignant storytelling, they illuminate the struggles of marginalised communities and challenge perceptions of justice and morality.

Originali is more than an album, it's a testament to Orkestar Kriminal's artistic evolution and cultural resonance. With each track, they invite listeners on a transcendent journey through time, language and the human experience. This ambitious venture solidifies their status as pioneers in the klezmer genre and Greek *rembetika* and as musicians building on a legacy.

BUZZ BURY

TRACK TO TRY *Sarajevski Vukovi*

Chris Smither
All About the Bones

Signature Sounds

★★★★☆

American folk and blues singer Chris Smither marks his upcoming 80th birthday with *All About the Bones*, a moody and primal listening experience. The album is another that Smither has developed with longtime producer and collaborator David Goodrich. Born in Miami but based in Boston for several years, Smither conjures up Gothic New Orleans in an evocative album rich in mournful laments and baroque sensibilities, all conveyed with honesty and sincerity reflecting the lived experience. ▸

LATIN REISSUES
BY MARK SAMPSON

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Cumbia Sabrosa Vol 2: Sonidero Bangers from the Discos Tropical Vaults

Rocafort Records

★★★★☆

One of two tremendous compilations focussed on small but esteemed labels. *Cumbia Sabrosa Vol 2* consists of three 7" singles. Somewhat eclipsed by Discos Fuentes and Sonolux in Colombia, Discos Tropical also had a Mexican subsidiary, and these six 'bangers' were beloved of Mexico's *sonidero* selectors, their sound systems and the dancers they courted. One record features big band *cumbia* (including Pacho Galán y Su Orquesta's glorious 'Funeral del Labrador'); another features coastal bands emphasising electric guitar and the metal scrapers that inspired the genre's epithet *chucu-chucu*; and the third spotlights renowned singer and accordionist, Andrés Landero.

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Ansonia Records Presents – Salsa Con Estilo – Dance Floor Gems from the Vaults: 1950s-1980s

Ansonia Records

★★★★★

Even better, certainly in terms of scope, is *Ansonia Records Presents – Salsa Con Estilo – Dance Floor Gems from the Vaults*. Rafael 'Ralph' Pérez' family-run label blazed a trail before Fania's eventual domination of the Nuyorican Latin dance scene. The 26 tracks focus on both the pre-1970s 'Roots of Salsa' era and subsequent 'Salsa Boom', and feature a plethora of vibrant sub-genres performed by such big-hitters as Tito Rodríguez, Mon Rivera and Cortijo, along with artists like Frankie Figueroa who deserve to be better known. A sparkling collection of multifarious gems.

Smither's carefully crafted lyrics (his songs have been covered by the likes of Bonnie Raitt and Emmylou Harris), perfectly suited to his rumbling baritone, and propulsive finger-picked guitar take centre stage. Chiselled folk and blues at its best.

BILLY ROUGH

TRACK TO TRY *All About the Bones*

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Africatown, AL Ancestor Sounds

Freedirt

★★★☆☆

After all Ian Brennan's field recordings of mostly non-professional musicians and singers recorded around the world from Rwanda to Romania and Cambodia to Comoros, this intriguing recording takes him back to the country of his birth and specifically the community of Africatown, just outside Mobile, Alabama. The local population there is made up of direct descendants of the 124 African men, women and children who arrived on *The Clotilde*, the last slave ship to reach American shores in 1860, and Brennan has recorded them in the form of expression of their choice. 'Run if You Can (Don't Go Down That Road)' is as primitive as anything recorded in the Delta a century ago by the original blues hunters, while 'Walk With Thee' is a similarly timeless a cappella gospel number. 'Do You Hear Me Now' is a piano ballad, 'Black Part of Town' features some free jazz sax blowing and 'Africatown in Their Face' is an unaccompanied rap. There are also ambient soundscapes recorded in the factories and surrounding countryside and some powerful spoken word interludes such as 'Sent to Vietnam, But Never Been to Africa' and 'Only Black School'. It's challenging, but deliberately so and, like every project Brennan undertakes, there's a raw honesty that is entirely admirable.

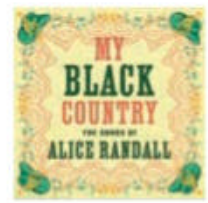
NIGEL WILLIAMSON

TRACK TO TRY ***Run if You Can (Don't Go Down That Road)***

My Black Country: The Songs of Alice Randall

Oh Boy Records

★★★☆☆



Anyone who enjoyed the 2019 Smithsonian Folkways album *Songs of Our Native Daughters* is going to love *My Black Country*. For a start, three of the '*native daughters*' – Rhiannon Giddens, Leyla McCalla, and Allison Russell – all contribute to this collection celebrating '*the Black female experience in country and folk music*.' The dozen songs, each featuring a different Black female singer, were written during the last 30 years and more by Alice Randall, one of the few Black female songwriters working in Nashville, and were all originally recorded by white artists. Highlights include McCalla's bluesy vocal on the stripped-down 'Small Towns'. 'The Ballad of Sally Anne' is a lynching lament sung by Giddens which starts out with a simple banjo accompaniment and swells to take in haunting fiddle and spooked horns. Allison Russell's 'Many Mansions' is gorgeous. Not everything here is quite as satisfying, although among the lesser known names Adia Victoria with her brooding 'Went for a Ride' and Sunny War with her punk-folk take on 'Solitary Hero' are outstanding. With Beyoncé recently becoming the first Black woman to top the US country chart with 'Texas Hold 'Em', this release could not be more timely.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

TRACK TO TRY *The Ballad of Sally Anne* by Rhiannon Giddens

ROOTS *US & CANADA*

by Devon Léger

With songs that speak of apiaries and medieval religious parables, and powerful fingerstyle guitar reminiscent of Nick Drake, folk songwriter **Creekbed Carter Hogan** pulls from an eclectic bag of influences on his album ***Creekbed Carter*** (Gar Hole Records ★★★★). Some influences come from Carter's Catholic upbringing, perhaps now a point of contention as they are a queer, trans artist living in an increasingly frustrating and dangerous country. With 'If I Was', Carter complains bitterly about how Americans care more for guns than people. Carter's literate songwriting also traces back to their background as a fiction writer and teacher. Still, there's no fiction as strange as America's current Dantean hellscape and Carter's the kind of artist to help us navigate it.

Canadian singer-songwriter **Abigail Lapell** seems incapable of writing a bad song. Her new album, ***Anniversary*** (Outside Music ★★★★), once again shows why she's one of the best folk songwriters in the country. She's said that the new album is about exploring the contradictory nature of pop culture's idea of love. She's subverting songwriting tropes, trying to hunt for the deeper emotions beneath the lipstick gloss. '*Diamonds are a dime-a-dozen*,' she sings on the opening track, '*take my hand and don't stop runnin*'.' Lapell's songs on *Anniversary* touch on grief as well, and religious iconography. She's tackling huge topics with a deft subtlety that's rare. Lapell recorded the album in an old church in Ontario, inviting Canadian indie band Great Lake Swimmers to join her on some glorious duets (that band's frontman Tony Dekker co-produced the album with her). Lapell's songs just get better and better over the years.

Banjo player and singer **Kendl Winter**'s music has always sounded like the rainy Pacific Northwest landscapes where she grew up. She's known for her work as a duo in The Lowest Pair and was signed to venerable indie grunge label K Records, so her new turn as a solo banjo meditationalist for the album ***Banjo Mantras*** (Delicata Records ★★★★) comes as a bit of a surprise. A lo-fi album of clawhammer banjo instrumentals, Winter developed these mantras as daily experiments to share on social media, bringing a little calm and reflection into the world. Winter's deft melodies and creative calm are a real balm on this album.

The debut full-length, ***Malegría*** (Psychic Hotline ★★★★), from guitarist and songwriter Fabi Reyna aka **Reyna Tropical** is a dizzying kaleidoscope of Latin American roots music. Reyna's also the editor of *She Shreds*, the first magazine for women and non-binary guitarists, so she's got a discerning ear for music. The songs on *Malegría* touch on indie-rock at times more than folk, but the underpinning rhythms and ideas come from Reyna's many travels in Latin America, especially drawing on sounds from Colombia, Mexico and Puerto Rico. There's no small amount of Manu Chao influence here either, the album title itself coming from a Chao song. It's a diasporic album, defined by a search for home and belonging, and built around a queer, anti-colonialist perspective.

Checking out the new album, ***The One & Only Scott H Biram*** (Bloodshot Records ★★★★) from blues shouter **Scott H Biram** is like travelling back in time to the early 2000s. Even the album art is a throwback. Way back then, Biram was building his name with roughneck vocals sung out through a bunch of scratchy vintage mics, stomping along onstage. He helped form an army of white blues dudes copying this style, but nobody ever got close to the way he could blend country blues, fire-and-brimstone gospel, rowdy honky-tonk and introspective songwriting so effortlessly. There's only ever been one Scott H Biram and this album on the newly returned Bloodshot Records shows that even if he's feeling a bit rough around the edges, he still hasn't lost his trademark ferocity.

Abigail Lapell

Jen Squires

ZERO
NOVE
NOVE
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ONDE
- OUT February 23th, 2024 -
MARIA MAZZOTTA
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"Turbocharged Alt-Country to gladden the heart" – Tom Robinson, BBC 6 Music
www.crhb.bandcamp.com
Read the review in this issue of Songlines

Niamh Bury
Yellow Roses

Claddagh Records

★★★★½

Nominated in the Best Emerging Artist category of the RTÉ Folk Awards 2024, Niamh Bury is swiftly rising as one of the finest singer-songwriters of the new Irish tradition. With echoes of Laura Marling and Fiona Apple but with a tone and focus all her own, Bury is an impressive and exciting new voice on the Irish folk scene and one that deserves to be heard beyond it.

'Who Am I to Tell Him' is a bouncing caution on judging others' lives, while 'Pianos in the Snow' is a gorgeous guitar-led song with family at its focus. The title-track, a delicate, intimate, yet orchestral track, is a loving tribute to her mother and grandmother.

'Beehive' starts as a timeless guitar piece which gently engages piano in a heartwarming and sumptuous slice of wonder. Closer, 'Budapest', inspired by a cold winter night in Dublin, explores imagination, hope and yearning and is a scenic end to a charming listen. Bury's storytelling prowess, keen songwriting sensibility and poetic heart shine throughout.

Beautifully crafted and enveloped in a lush, warm soundscape, *Yellow Roses*, with Bury's tender, sweet voice at its core, is as a thing of beauty. Treat yourself.

BILLY ROUGH

TRACK TO TRY *Budapest*

Ana Lua Caiano
Vou Ficar Neste Quadrado

Glitterbeat Records

★★★½☆

An experimental fusion of Portuguese folk, introspective soul-searching and out-there electronica, this debut album by Ana Lua Caiano is an enthralling, unpredictable experience. Caiano, from Lisbon, was classically trained as a child and then moved onto jazz. It was only when the global pandemic forced her into isolation, however, that she began experimenting with technology, creating a unique sound that has drawn comparisons with Björk and Laurie Anderson. Besides her own vocals, she plays keyboards and a variety of unorthodox percussion instruments, such as a rattle made out of dolls. Her breakthrough came when in 2022 she performed at a WOMEX showcase in Lisbon, to great acclaim. The performance led to the release of two EPs.

Right from the start of this album, Caiano launches us into her world of surreal, multi-layered sounds. The short intro track bombards us with radio babble, fading away to whispered chants and echoing waves and wind. As for why she mixes traditional music with electronica, Caiano explains simply "... nowadays you can make traditional music with a computer or talk about themes that weren't relevant or didn't exist in the past. Traditional music is always evolving." Caiano's mood and message span a wide spectrum across the album; from the dark 'Deixem o Morto Morrer' (Let the Dead Die) to the whimsical title-track (translating as I Shall Stay in this Square) teasing stay-at-home locals who are content to remain in the town plaza. Caiano herself looks unlikely to stay still any time soon, and this challenging, fantastical album will find her new audiences far and wide.

HUW HENNESSY

TRACK TO TRY *Os Meus Sapatos Não Tocam nos Teus*

Olivia Chaney
Circus of Desire

Kartel Music Group

★★★★½

It's been five years since Olivia Chaney's last solo album, *Shelter*, which came between the stellar set of traditional balladry of 2017's Offa Rex group and last year's EP of French songs, but now she returns as ringmaster in her own *Circus of Desire*. Since *Shelter*, she's moved to Yorkshire and become a mother. Recorded in New York with producer and multi-instrumentalist Thomas Bartlett of The Gloaming, *Circus of Desire* comprises ten new songs and a cover of Dory Previn's heartbreaking 'Lady with the Braid'. The delicate, pensive beauty of opening track 'Art of Losing' sets up the album's deep, resonant tones of emotional, psychological chiaroscuro – self-probing, self-aware, self-doubting, but also turning away from the self to embrace a collective sense of being human, in lyrics whose surface simplicity belies the complexity of feeling and insight she brings to them, and the depths she reaches when she sings them.

The title-track evokes the worlds of pleasure, pain, spectacle and risk that open up when the circus of desire comes to our town. Tender songs to Chaney's daughter, 'Calliope', and to her sister, 'To the Lighthouse', sit alongside questing, questioning self-interrogations such as 'Mirror Mirror'. The music on *Circus of Desire* is spare, beautifully arranged and performed, and wrapped up in Nico Muhly's string arrangements, while Olivia Chaney's vocals are as stunning as ever.

TIM CUMMING

TRACK TO TRY *Art of Losing*

TOP OF THE WORLD
TRACK 7

Cyril Cyril
Le Futur Ça Marche Pas

Les Disques Bongo Joe

★★★★☆

One of the most rewarding things while listening to Cyril Cyril's third album is not being able to anticipate what is going to happen next. It's like the whole world was thrown into a blender and this myriad sound came out of it. *Le Futur Ça Marche Pas* (The Future Doesn't Work) is a sort of psychedelic bundle that feeds on funk basslines, a steady motorik beat, a banjo turned into desert blues guitar, a singing voice that resists singing (triggering memories of 80s French rock acts, hip-hop, Brigitte Fontaine or Laurie Anderson, take your pick); each new song is a surprise. There is such an explosion of creativity in Swiss Cyril Cyril's music that French psychobilly-surf-rock-Mexican sounding act La Femme seem like a good pairing.

There was already a lot to be excited about in Cyril Yeterian and Cyril Bondi's previous albums, but *Le Futur Ça Marche Pas* is clearly a major step forward, summoning Meridian Brothers' Eblis Álvarez for the tense, kaleidoscopic and brilliant 'Microonda Sahara', Inès Mouzoune for the Arabic trance in 'La Rotation de l'Axe' (Al-Qasar come to mind) and Violeta Garcia for the hypnotic noise and electronic title-track. And then there's the spectacular post-punk and jazzy eruption of 'Les Phoenix de l'Amour' and 'Plus Rien à Faire', as indebted to hip-hop as to industrial rock and Gnawa.

Forget about predictability. With Cyril Cyril anything can happen. Let us raise a glass to that.

GONÇALO FROTA

TRACK TO TRY *Les Phoenix de l'Amour*

Leo Marussich

Carlos Coronado
Flamenco Mediterráneo
Segell Microscopi

★★★½☆

Carlos Coronado likes to establish a musical connection with landscape. Having been born in the Baix Empordà region of Catalonia, the guitarist had his share of rock and jazz bands before searching for a more meaningful exploration of music inspired by the Mediterranean landscape (to which he feels deeply connected). And he found flamenco, with its enticing rhythms, a suitable framework. But while delving into flamenco, Coronado did not lose sight of his broader Mediterranean horizon.

After some years of practicing and perfecting his technique, the young Spanish guitarist gathers all his resources and teachings and spreads them out in *Flamenco Mediterráneo*, using the traditional flamenco structures as the background to his free-spirited compositions. Thinking of landscapes such as a holm oak forest, a small cove or a full moon, Coronado references flamenco as a starting point but goes into jazzy and other Mediterranean music geography in stunners like 'Soleà' and 'Font Martina'. And for every clap by Marc López and Pere Martinez that brings flamenco closer to home, there is Montserrat Martos' violin (for example, in 'Fandango Mediterrani') stretching its boundaries.

Most likely Carlos Coronado won't climb the heights of Paco de Lucía or Vicente Amigo, but his flamenco is a fresh, appealing and charismatic take on the genre.

GONÇALO FROTA

TRACK TO TRY *Font Martina (Preludi and Rondeña)*

Paco de Lucía & Pepe de Lucía
Pepito y Paquito
BMG

★★★★½

Many albums are ballyhooed for their 'historic' significance. Most are truly significant only as gap-fillers on the shelves of completist collectors. That's not the case with *Pepito y Paquito*, a two-LP/CD of unpublished recordings featuring budding flamenco musicians and brothers, singer Pepe and guitarist Paco de Lucía, when the boys were 13 and 11 years old, respectively. During 1959 and 60, a family friend with a Grundig TK46 tape recorder made a series of recordings at Paco and Pepe's home. The tapes disappeared in 1967, but were found in 2022. A restoration using AI brought the rough recordings up to commercially viable standards. In addition to the first sound recordings of the prodigious brothers – 'Bulerías Niño Ricardo', a solo guitar showcase named for one of Paco's heroes, and 'Me Falta la Resistencia', a tango that highlight's Pepe's extraordinary vocal power – the collection covers multiple flamenco song types ranging from *polo* ('Que el Viente se la Llevó') and *soleá* ('Al Pilarico por Agua') to *seguiriyas* ('Romance de Juan Osuna') and *fandango* ('Voy a Tener Que Dejarte'). *Pepito y Paquito* provides extraordinary insight into the development of modern flamenco, which, particularly in Paco's hands, transformed the Spanish song form and the late guitarist into global sensations.

DOUG DELOACH

TRACK TO TRY *Voy a Tener Que Dejarte*

The Do Goodrs
Ridiculous Things
Old Age Recording Company

★★★½☆

Seattle's The Do Goodrs debut album dives deep into personal storytelling and cultural fusion through the band's love of Balkan *sevdah* music. Hadjia and Gino Jevdjevic, refugees with rich musical backgrounds, join with the talents of Amy Denio, Darek Mazzone and Nedim Hamzić (Hadžija) to craft a compelling and brooding musical path.

The album delivers raw cries of pity, playful vocals and a fusion of traditional melodies and contemporary considerations. Listening, you begin to understand that the term sevdah comes from the Turkish '*sevda*', '*the forlorn angst associated with lovesickness… rooted in the Persian [for] melancholic.*' The Do Goodrs share observational cultural narratives, personal explorations of love, self-reflection and political sentiment, bringing them to life with instruments like the *oud*, accordion and *bouzouki*, which add depth to the English sung lyrics, creating an evocative atmosphere.

The album closes with a tribute to Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, with a version of Sufi classic 'Allah Who' (also known as 'Allah Hoo'). This album showcases the band's skillful blend of cultural heritage and modern sensibilities.

BUZZ BURY

TRACK TO TRY *I Say the Most Ridiculous Things*

Jacken Elswyth
At Fargrounds
Wrong Speed Records

★★★½☆

Jacken Elswyth is a banjo player and instrument maker known for her work as a member of the Shovel Dance Collective. On her third solo album, the London-based musician demonstrates her deep connection with her instruments. She builds using cherry, oak and walnut, and plays with a sensitivity for what she has created.

Elswyth plays banjo, mountain banjo and *shruti* box on a mix of traditional tunes and original live improvisations, accompanied by Kate Gathercole on fiddle and harmonium and Mark Waters on double bass. While the shruti box provides the meditative drone, the banjo, fiddle and harmonium work melodies over the top.

This instrumental collection is a curious mix of the tuneful and the experimental. The album lurches from distinctive melodies to moments of discordant soundscape in a way that is in danger of not satisfying any but the most eclectic of tastes. That said, the best of the banjo tunes – 'Lost Gander', 'Sugar Hill' and 'A Fisherman's Song for Attracting Seals / Full Rigged Ship' – are wonderful, but be prepared for the occasional jarring note in among the rolling crests of the musical waves.

NATHANIEL HANDY

TRACK TO TRY *A Fisherman's Song for Attracting Seals / Full Rigged Ship*

Goblin Band
Slack Your Horse
Broadside Hacks Recordings

★★★★½

Goblin Band are a six-piece who coalesced around London's Hobgoblin music shop. Their liner notes for this 30-minute set of traditional songs focus on how the politics of previous times are a mirror to our own. Traditional music is the great working class art form, embedded with politics as deeply as it is with story and myth, and the likes of 'The Brisk Lad' and 'The Prickle Holly Bush' tell of the criminalisation of poverty and the long shadow of punishment. It's no green and pleasant land and nightmares are close at hand.

Set to a rich, rough, oozy music, and with some dramatic vocal work, the set's highlight is an 11-minute version of the Copper Family's 'Birds in the Spring' paired with 'May Morning Dew', the singers' voices supported by a visceral instrumental dronescape incorporating accordion and violin. They finish with the jaunty comedy of disaster that is 'Widecombe Fayre' – once covered by Benny Hill – a song they describe as '*well known to older generations, and surely hold[ing] the prize for the most merchandise associated with an English folk song.*' Market forces may well have done for the poor old mare, but I look forward to the Goblins' merch stand.

TIM CUMMING

TRACK TO TRY *Bird in the Spring / May Morning Dew*

Hulbækmo & Jacobsen Familieorkester
Rundsnurrknurr
Heilo

★★★★★

My first encounter with Hans Hulbækmo was when he was a final year student at the Trondheim Conservatoire, the outstanding drummer in the deliciously quirky jazz-and-beyond trio Moskus. He'd grown up surrounded by folk royalty with his much-respected musician parents Tone Hulbækmo and Hans Fredrik Jacobsen, and his brother Alf Hulbækmo, so no surprise that Hans was soon developing his own style and identity and bringing them into various new projects. He was soon courted by some of the great names on the Norwegian music scene including the power-house band Atomic and forming the successful glitter and sequins band Broen. All of which serves to prepare you for this quite out-of-the-ordinary family album of Norwegian dance tunes. These tunes sound as if they've just leapt out from a dusty archive and are determined to party. Different tunings create a brilliant east-west vibe, and there's a huge, ever-changing palette of instruments, a riot of colour: lyres and *kantele*, pump organ, saxophone, accordion, mouth harp, voices and, of course, a style of drumming which is mischievously confusing and a sheer delight. Here are 17 tracks which defy expectation, which render the listener helpless, exhausted and grinning from ear to ear.

FIONA TALKINGTON

TRACK TO TRY *Rundsnurrknurr*

in.dia
Perfeita Desordem
in.dia

★★☆☆☆

When one hears of a duo comprised of Portuguese guitar and classical guitar, *fado* understandably pops into mind. But although coming from Coimbra, birthplace for one of the two fado streams, in.dia are not interested in filling that role. The instrumental path Diogo Passos and Hugo Gamboias follow is not constrained by any genre rules and keeps aiming at a loose and uncomplicated freedom. In order to expand on the instruments' natural vocabularies in *Perfeita Desordem*, Passos and Gamboias resort to effects pedals (used in a sober way), go a little crazy over the electronic-riddled 'Romance' (with a little help from their friend Gabriel Silva), display their talent in the South American and flamenco-tinged 'Catedral' and even give a nod to Paredes' legacy in ▸

TOP OF THE WORLD TRACK 9

Hajda Banda
Hajda!

Karrot Kommando

★★★★½

This is the debut of a new band focussing on the traditional music of Polesia, a region of eastern Poland, western Belarus and Ukraine. The band was put together by violinist and singer Daria Butskaya. They won the audience award at Polish Radio's New Tradition Awards in 2022. I saw them live on stage in Lublin – and on the streets.

The six-piece includes violins, accordion, cello, *cimbalom*, frame drums and strong vocals. From the get-go, with a chunky accordion tune and violin swoops in the opening polkas, the music is closely recorded and you feel like you are almost part of the band. Several of the tunes come from archive recordings, but several come from players that Butskaya and members of the band have met. One of the most infectious is the 'Tango od S V Malenczyka' and they describe Malenczyk, who died in 2007, as '*a luminary of Belarusian folk music.*' Another catchy virtuoso dance is the 'Oberek od S Rosy'. There's a tasty variety – strong polyphonic vocals ('Ciacze Reczańka'), exuberant dances ('Babaczka' and 'Koluszka') and more reflective numbers like the closing 'Siwy Koń' (The Grey Horse), where, around the vocals, the violins interweave in an exquisite counterpoint over cello and cimbalom. A special album of unusual repertoire.

SIMON BROUGHTON

TRACK TO TRY *Tango od S V Malenczyka*

'Danças em Lá' and 'Valsa Brilhante'. Still, the pair sound more affecting whenever they welcome a melancholy peak as on 'Memórias' or 'Variações Sobre Memórias Perdidas', investing more in melodic exploration than technical, reminding the listener of Portuguese ensemble Madredeus' musical universe. Gratifying as it is that in.dia lead a quest for originality, avoiding the usual clichés that often come about when the Portuguese guitar joins her classical companion, they still need to sharpen their identity and their songwriting prowess.

GONÇALO FROTA

TRACK TO TRY *Memórias*

Johanna-Adele Jüssi
Slåtter fra Gaupdalen IV (Tunes from the Lynx Valley IV)

ta:lik

★★★★½

Originally from Estonia, fiddle player Jüssi has spent much of her life travelling around the Nordic countries as well as Germany and the Shetland Isles before settling in Norway, her home for the last nine years. Here she found musical soulmates in Bendik Lund Haanshus (guitars) and bass player Christo Stangness who delight as much in Nordic dance tunes as in ancient hymns finding layers and textures that transport the listener somewhere quite new. And that place is Jüssi's starting point, her imaginary valley, her dream place to create her music. It's a place where anything can happen, where this trio weave folk tunes with elements of Nordic jazz, steeped in Jüssi's deep knowledge learned through her travels. Lynx Valley, she says, "is the place where I wanted to live, where my musical wanderings could rest and develop." Jüssi's fiddle and viola playing are warm and brilliantly engaging in all the styles explored here. The traditional hymn 'Salmetone' reaches back in time and creates new visions, the opening 'Plan C' celebrates the humanity of folk music and who wouldn't want to meet the mischievous 'Helle & Magnus'.

FIONA TALKINGTON

TRACK TO TRY *Plan C*

Oisin Leech
Cold Sea

Outside Music

★★★½☆

Cold Sea is the first solo release from Oisin Leech, who may be more familiar as one half of Irish folk duo The Lost Brothers. Recorded, to quote, '*beside Trawbreaga Bay, in Co Donegal, on the Northern Coast of Ireland, in an old schoolhouse with a suitcase full of borrowed recording gear,*' it's a beautifully atmospheric and chilled album – a contemplative, hopeful, auditory voyage. There's a soft transatlantic vibe with *Cold Sea*, natural considering it is produced by Steve Gunn and features Tony Garnier (Bob Dylan's longtime bassist), American singer-songwriter M Ward, fiddle from Roisin McGrory and *bouzouki* from Irish folk legend Dónal Lunny. Yet, it remains distinctly Leech's creation, showcasing his prowess as a captivating and accomplished songwriter. Largely acoustic but interwoven with haunting electric guitar, synth and strings, the album exudes a timeless, evocative ambience. 'Maritime Radio' artfully incorporates snippets of a spoken weather radio broadcast, while 'Colour of the Rain' stands out as a melancholic, introspective gem. Closer 'Daylight', featuring Gunn on synth, provides a tranquil, laidback closure to a listen that will linger long in your mind. *Cold Sea* is a fragile, delicate delight.

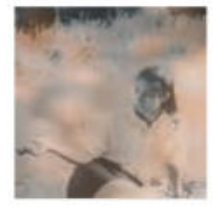
BILLY ROUGH

TRACK TO TRY *Colour of the Rain*

Carme López
Quintela

Warm Winters Ltd

★★★☆☆



Carme López plays the Galician *gaita* (bagpipes), but for this debut album she's dedicated to what sounds like the deep surgery of her instrument, placing its bag under the microscope, and examining its contents. This extended suite is book-ended by a short prologue and epilogue, where we hear the pipes in a more traditional vein, with slow and graceful melodic progressions, over sustained tones that have a surprising purity, an affinity to organ or harmonium. As the four longer sections evolve, López seems to be using deeply-placed microphone techniques, and possibly electronic effects, zooming close to interior sounds of breathing, faint fingering, even suggesting a heartbeat. There are low, soft, duck-like sounds, as well as a halo of higher toned embellishments. It's as if our headphones are actually inside the bag. Space is cleared for a smooth dronescape, different tones hanging beside each other, interacting almost by chance. We imagine a small church organ, then hear small percussive clicks. The entire bagpipe is used. There's a growing global enthusiasm for 'bodiless music', where the generative instrument's nature might be disguised, or heavily mutated. Ultimately, the epilogue ends up with a warming slow folk dance for one.

MARTIN LONGLEY

TRACK TO TRY *Epilogue: Inflorescencia*

Karolina Majewska

Songbook

‘Amazing Grace’ with Jon Bickley and James Walvin

L-R: Jon Bickley, Angeline Morrison and Cohen Braithwaite-Kilcoyne; Below: James Walvin

‘I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.’

The first ever rendition of ‘Amazing Grace’ took place at St Peter and St Paul Church in Olney, Buckinghamshire on January 1, 1773. It had been written by the church’s curate Reverend John Newton in the lead-up to New Year’s Day. Originally titled ‘Faith’s Review and Expectation’, it has since become one of the world’s most popular hymns, sung by Elvis Presley, Aretha Franklin and Andrea Bocelli, with the US Library of Congress holding records of more than 3,000 performances

However, the story of the song is not without problems. Before being ordained, John Newton (1725-1807) had been a sailor, captaining a number of slave ships in the 1750s. When folk singer Jon Bickley began looking at ways to commemorate the 250th anniversary of ‘Amazing Grace’ in 2023 for the Cowper and Newton Museum in Olney, this was a fact he couldn’t ignore. “It struck me that there was a huge gap between slave trader and the world’s most beloved hymn today,” he says. “You know if that’d been any other person they would have been cancelled. So, what was going on? And I didn’t feel that a fat old white guy was necessarily qualified to participate in that. So I went to the Arts Council and got some money and approached Angeline Morrison and Cohen Braithwaite-Kilcoyne to come and join in.”

The three of them set about researching the song, its place in popular culture and its connection to the slave trade, which they documented in a podcast series and which led to a concert last summer, as well as an album, *Grace Will Lead Me Home*, that is just getting released. It includes interpretations of Newton’s letters, a version of ‘Jesu thy Word is My Delight’, the tune that was originally used for the hymn, as well as original songs looking at Newton’s life and the transatlantic slave trade. Of course, it also includes their version of ‘Amazing Grace’.

But, how did this hymn from a small market town in England become such a big hit? I asked James Walvin, a British author who this year published a tome on the song, *Amazing Grace: A Cultural History of the Beloved Hymn*. He replied: “It landed in the US by 1800, and took off among the slaves and among the vast crowds of American worshippers. Thus it had two major supporters: African-American life (churches and gospel) and dissenting churches (mainly Baptists and Methodists.) The tune we know today didn’t really take off until after the 1830s.” Walvin had decided to write the book after seeing then-US President Barack Obama sing the hymn at a funeral in 2015. “Watch it on YouTube,” Walvin testifies. “It’s a riveting, brilliant piece which captures so many aspects of the hymn and its following.”

What does he think Newton’s career in the slave trade says about the legacy of the song? “There is a link,” he contends, “about how even a great sinner, a slave captain, could be redeemed. He found grace after a sinful life.” Which carries weight. In 1788, Newton broke silence on his role in the slave trade by publishing a pamphlet, *Thoughts Upon the Slave Trade*, in which he apologised for the role he played in the industry, and he became an advocate of abolishing the slave trade until his death in 1807, shortly after the UK abolished slavery.

When asked to name his favourite version of ‘Amazing Grace’, Walvin goes for Paul Robeson (“a wonderful, moving timeless version”) and Obama (“…even though he can’t sing for toffee”). To the same question Bickley replies “Well, I’m of an age where I was moved by Judy Collins,” adding “We interviewed Judy Collins for our project, she’s a real live wire,” before adding Robeson, Mahalia Jackson and Aretha Franklin as other favourites.

I put it to Bickley that it’s incredible how far removed these performances are from that 18th-century parish church in Olney. “And I think that that’s probably the clue as to why Newton hasn’t been cancelled,” he responds. “It’s because the hymn has left him and it’s gone and had its own life somewhere else.”

And why does Walvin think people are still singing it? “There’s the great mystery!” he says. “Is it the words or the tune? In the US it’s perhaps a national anthem. Elsewhere, it speaks to the downtrodden; it offers hope to everyone.”

RUSS SLATER JOHNSON

Maddie Morris
Skin

No Masters

★★★★☆

Engaging folk with contemporary issues Maddie Morris’ debut full-length album, *Skin*, is an insightful listen. A deeply socially conscious songwriter, Morris strives for inclusion and the amplification of marginalised voices, particularly those of the LGBTQIA+ community, and *Skin* expertly blends such voices in an album which proves perceptively inspiring. *Skin* opens with a tribute to the American gay rights activist ‘Marsha P Johnson’; a heartfelt, personal narrative from Morris. They reflect on their own teenage years as a disabled and neurodivergent queer person, grappling with hiding aspects of themselves they feared made them different. ‘*We are taught to take it on the chin, like a manifesto of our skin*,’ sings Morris in this opener, setting the tone for a politically and emotionally charged album. Boundaries and traditions are lovingly stretched and questioned throughout the Leeds-based Morris’ record. ‘Wee Weaver’, for example, switches the song’s romance between Willie and Mary to Lilly and Mary. Its delivered with a respectful nod to tradition, showcasing the flexibility and fluidity of tradition. More contemporary narratives are present, too, in the powerfully personal ‘The IT Teacher’, narrating Morris’ experiences of prejudice in their school years. Throughout the album, private narratives intertwine with the broader political landscape, echoing the sentiment ‘the personal is political.’ *Skin*’s core though remains hopeful and positive – Morris’ debut showcases a thrilling, glorious, and inspiring voice.

BILLY ROUGH

TRACK TO TRY *Marsha P Johnson*

Matt Fleming

Angeline Morrison, Cohen Braithwaite-Kilcoyne & Jon Bickley
Grace Will Lead Me Home

Invisible Folk

★★★☆☆

Last year was the 250th anniversary of the writing of ‘Amazing Grace’ while next year is the 300th anniversary of the birth of the hymn’s writer, John Newton. To mark the dual occasion the Cowper and Newton museum in Buckinghamshire commissioned the folk singer Jon Bickley to co-ordinate a project celebrating the legacy of ‘Amazing Grace’. His research is detailed in a series of podcasts and he also invited two Black folk singers to contribute to an album of songs old and new exploring the legacy of the one-time slaver turned abolitionist. Without diminishing the input of her two colleagues, it is Morrison, following her triumphant 2022 album *The Sorrow Songs*, who emerges here as the star. Her ‘Dear Polly’ is based on Newton’s letters to his wife; ‘Turn Round Newton’ is another powerful composition and ‘Grace Will Lead Me Home’, which she sings with a children’s choir, boasts an utterly gorgeous arrangement that sits halfway between gospel and doo-wop. Braithwaite-Kilcoyne contributes the ▸

striking 'Press Gang Song' and the Anglo concertina instrumental 'Fantasia on a West Indian Burial Theme' and Bickley's songs include 'I'm Going To Hear John Newton Preach' with a narrative tracing the slaver's conversion. Needless to say the album ends with a splendidly earthy folk rendition of 'Amazing Grace' itself.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

TRACK TO TRY *Grace Will Lead Me Home*

Ben Nicholls
Duets

Hudson Records

★★★★½

Featuring many of the artists with whom he has worked over a 30-year career, bassist and singer Ben Nicholls parades a retinue of folk's finest across the 14 songs on *Duets*, beginning with a beguiling vocal from Nadine Shah on a ruminative 'Cuckoo'. Other guests include Cara Dillon, Sam and Seth Lakeman, Tim Eriksen, Kris Drever, Fay Hield, John Smith, Martin Simpson, Sam Sweeney, Patsy Reid and Jon Boden. That's quite a line-up. As such, it's something of a British folk All-Stars from the past three decades, with Nicholls' bass a key driver. Tim Erickson's vocal is brilliant on the uneasy 'Corydon', from 1840s America, while John Smith commands the pathos of Richard Thompson's 'Down Where the Drunkards Roll'. Jon Boden is as distinctive as ever on 'Polly Vaughan', while Cara Dillon leads a delicate and gorgeous take on the oft-covered 'I Wonder What's Keeping My True Love Tonight' which also features Sam Lakeman. 'Flash Company' gets some flash Martin Simpson guitar work, with Nicholls' bass looming at its shoulder, while 'Northern Frisk' features the mercurial playing of Leveret and Bellowhead fiddler Sam Sweeney duetting against Nicholls' nimble bass lines, and Seth Lakeman brings his distinctive, driving energy to 'The Fire'. This set of duets is a gift that keeps giving.

TIM CUMMING

TRACK TO TRY *I Wonder What's Keeping My True Love Tonight (Cara Dillon & Sam Lakeman)*

Maria Mazzotta
Onde

Zero Nove Nove

★★★★½

Renowned Salento songbird Mazzotta embarks on a daring musical journey with collaborators Ernesto Nobili (guitars) and Cristiano Della Monica (drums, percussion and electronics). With the sea echoing throughout the songs, the metaphor of the waves (*Onde*) is to delve into the ever-changing emotional landscapes, encapsulating love, turmoil, joy and anger. Mazzotta's stirring and passionate vocal personality intertwine seamlessly with edgy psychedelic guitars and post-rock attitude, creating a distinctive sound evident on the opener 'La Furtuna', originally a traditional Salento song. A beloved highlight in her live performances, 'Libro d'Amore' pairs emotional poetry with a compelling guitar arrangement. The newly crafted 'Sula Nu Puei Stare' connects flamenco *bulería* with Bombino's desert guitar. Elsewhere, 'Damme la Manu' features a circular guitar riff reminiscent of traditional multi-part singing, while 'Nanna Core / Pizzica de Core (Malencunia)' presents distorted guitars and relentless drum beats igniting a spirited *pizzica* dance.

Mazzotta expands her Southern musical scope – her heartfelt voice honours iconic Sicilian folk singer Rosa Balistreri ('Terra Ca Nun Senti') and Neapolitan composer and researcher Roberto De Simone ('Marinaresca'). Also, she explores the Gargano region's repertoire on the bluesy-tinged 'Viestesana'. Volker Goetze's trumpet enriches the intimate 'Canto e Sogno', whereas Mazzotta's singing soars in the fisherman's prayer 'Matonna Te Lu Mare', serving as a poignant finale for this remarkable release.

CIRO DE ROSA

TRACK TO TRY *La Furtuna*

TOP OF THE WORLD TRACK 10

ZA! + Perrate
Jolifanto

Lovemonk

★★★★½

For all its depth of tradition, flamenco has always been moved by innovation. In 1979 Camarón de le Isla's *La Leyenda del Tiempo* experimented with new sounds and in 1996 Enrique Morente worked with a full rock band on *Omega*. Now the *cantaor* Perrate takes up the mantle in his own way.

His last album *Tres Golpes* (reviewed in *Songlines* #179) caused a stir with the involvement of leading producer Raül Refree. Now, with *Jolifanto* Perrate goes a giant step further. His collaborators this time are the avant-garde electronic rock duo ZA! (think of them as a Catalan Chemical Brothers and you won't be far wrong). And if that sounds wild, you're getting the right picture.

On 'Pregones', Perrate sings over psychedelic rave and trumpet extemporisations. On the title-track, he is swarmed by electronic trance sounds. In places the sound is heavy, dense and industrial in texture. But the subtler tracks are some of the most successful, like the electric guitar-driven 'Tarareos' and 'Steve Kahn' carried by marimba sounds.

This outlandish, astounding release is guaranteed to displease many, but it might be one of the most important albums in any imagined future of flamenco.

JO SETTERS

TRACK TO TRY *Steve Kahn*

Mirja Palo
Riegádahttin

Bjärka Records

★★★½☆

'Life is here, can you feel it?' Mirja Palo's lyrics don't shy away from the pain of labour and childbirth and the impending closeness of a new life. In this album, she says, "I wanted to use my own and others' experiences to musically portray the pregnant state in all of its vulnerability, fragility and, at the same time, the immense force that is released while giving birth." Feelings which are both universal and, here, deeply personal. Palo expresses these feelings – from pain and mystery, to female strength – ▸

Alejandra Amere

New Album

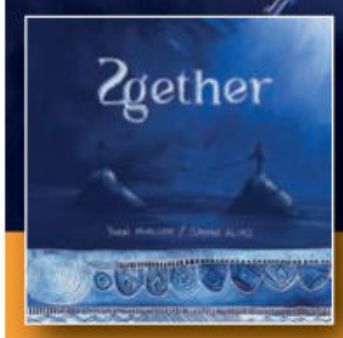
2gether

Yinon Muallem & Saman Alias

Oriental Maqam Meets Jazz

"Deeply felt solos crown the imaginative compositions."

Jazz Thing
May 2024



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VV.AA.
"Cumbia Cumbia Cumbia!!! Vol. 1" 2LP
A selection of 24 Colombian cumbia bangers for the dance floor from the deep vaults of Discos Fuentes, the most emblematic and best remembered label in the golden age of the genre. An invitation to enjoy and be amazed, above and beyond ethnographic and academic concerns.

OTHER VAMPISOUL NEW RELEASES:
Príncipe y su Sexteto "Salsa de Guaguancó", Brooklyn Sounds "Brooklyn Sounds!"

immersed in her own heritage from the north of Sweden and in the Sámi language, using the traditional *kantele* (Finnish lyre). Her voice is warm and powerful and the tracks in which she includes traditional *joik* singing are compelling ('Beaivelotti Soajit'). Percussion from Jonas Sjöblom adds interesting textures ('Tule Luoja'), too. *Riegádhattin* is a thoughtful and thought-provoking album, which sees Mirja Palo articulating her poetry so clearly that it's easy to get caught up in its purring rhythms, with no need for translations. It is also beautifully produced.

FIONA TALKINGTON

TRACK TO TRY *Tule Luoja*

Grace Petrie
Build Something Better

RobotNeedsHome

★★★★½

Grace Petrie is a Leicester-born singer-songwriter and musical activist who sounds better, and angrier, with every new album. She started recording back in 2006, and six years later was part of the 11-person Anti-Capitalist Roadshow project along with the likes of Peggy Seeger, Leon Rosselson and Robb Johnson.

The success of her last album, *Connectivity,* also released on the '*DIY*' The Robot Needs Home Collective label back in 2022*,* led to an impressive spate of global touring. Now comes *Build Something Better*, a glorious mixture of blistering folk-rock fury matched against equally impressive personal and acoustic songs that show off her fine, no-nonsense vocals and ability to write powerful and memorable melodies. Produced by Frank Turner, with whom she has toured, the album starts and ends with her furious critique of the UK. In 'The Best Country in the World' she laments the lack of compassion, over-crowded prison cells and '*beaches full of shit*,' while 'English Culture' chronicles mortgage payments and hunger. In 'Meanwhile in Texas', Petrie extends her attack to the American far right, while the exuberant and positive 'Fixer Upper' offers hope for the future. On all those songs, Petrie is backed by a gutsy, full-tilt band dominated by percussion and fiddle, but elsewhere she switches to acoustic guitar for the likes of 'King and Country' and the charming and personal love song 'If I Were To Outlive You'.

ROBIN DENSELOW

TRACK TO TRY *The Best Country in the World*

Grace Petrie

Emily Marcovecchio

Daisy Rickman
Howl
Daisy Rickman

★★★★½

Howl means 'Sun' in Cornish, and this is the Kernow singer and artist's second album, following on from 2022's *Donsya A'n Loryow* (Dance of the Moons), with which it shares a woozy, dream-infused acoustic soundscape of breathy vocals in Cornish and English, acoustic guitars, strings and drones. *Howl* opens with 'Falling Through the Rising Sun', acoustic guitar and *sitar* duetting over Rickman's vocals, low-voiced enough to bear comparisons with Nico, sharing with the great 20th-century chanteuse a depth of transmission that takes these songs a long way.

The musical textures shimmer and shift around her, rising and sinking and resonant with echo. It has the feeling of a procession, a soundscape of symbol and metaphor, squawling violin rising up around the depths of her voice on 'Bleujen an Howl', supported by a walking-paced riff with a tambourine support that leans towards the Velvets' 'Venus in Furs' territory. The title-track is a haunted instrumental comprising sheets of jagged cello, drawing out its drone side, and sitar, while 'Winter Solstice' has a keyboard drone and restless rhythm section and the closing 'Howlsedhesow' circles itself under Rickman's deep, rich vocal to mesmerising effect.

TIM CUMMING

TRACK TO TRY *Falling Through the Rising Sun*

Cosmo Sheldrake
Ear to the Eye
Tardigrade Records

★★★½☆

Following on from last year's compact, 22-minute *Wild Wet World* with its largely aquatic, ocean-going orchestra of sounds, comes a gargantuan 22-song double LP set. Cosmo is the son of scientist Rupert Sheldrake and voice therapist Jill Purse, and brother to biologist Merlin, with whom he runs a company selling live, fermented hot sauce. The strange brew of music fermenting here between ear and eye again includes recordings from the natural world, alongside the nine-piece female and non-binary choir HOWL, and a six-part horn section that installs a party at the heart of 'I Stitched My Mind Back to My Body'. Curlews, whales, fish and frogs make themselves heard amid glitchy, angular minimalist electronics soothed by vocal chorales and Sheldrake's own clipped vocals and quirky lyrics. There's a good deal of idiosyncrasy at play across the tracks, the sprightly brass section throwing shapes and shade across tracks like 'I Did and I Don't and I Do' and 'Run', which sounds like an escapee from a stage show version of James Bond, while the glitchy abstract electronica that segues into bird song and insect chatter on 'But Once a Child' recalls his vivid explorations on *Wake Up Calls*.

TIM CUMMING

TRACK TO TRY *I Stitched My Mind Back to My body*

Jenny Sturgeon & Boo Hewerdine
Outliers
Hudson Records

★★★☆☆

The title of this collaboration between singer-songwriters Jenny Sturgeon and Boo Hewerdine encapsulates the lockdown experience in which it was forged. In 2020/21, between their homes in Shetland and Glasgow, they shared ideas and music digitally to gradually build the bare bones of an album about those things that lie on the margins.

Sturgeon, known for her work with the band Salt House and for her musical interpretation of the writings of natural history author Nan Shepherd on 2020's *The Living Mountain*, brings the same intimate connection with the Scottish natural environment to this record. Hewerdine brings a more experimental and less folk-based vibe.

While Sturgeon's lyrical content dwelling on the natural world of Scotland's fringes inhabits a similar sonic world to the likes of Karine Polwart and Cara Dillon, Hewerdine's more psychological meditations feel much more the stuff of the urban café table ruminator. This makes for a record that feels a little dislocated, between two poles, which I suppose is exactly what it was. And just like lockdown itself, the dislocation hasn't resulted in a totally satisfying experience.

NATHANIEL HANDY

TRACK TO TRY *The Longest Day*

FOLK *ENGLAND, IRELAND, SCOTLAND & WALES*
by Billy Rough

Airneán (NOTIFY ★★★) may be the third release from Irish instrumental band **NOTIFY** but it's the first featuring their new six-piece line up. With a blend of folk, traditional Irish sounds and jazz, NOTIFY skilfully merge concertina, fiddle, guitars and bass, creating a soundtrack complemented by electronica. It's an exciting mix that showcases the vitality, energy and experimentation the Irish music scene richly encourages. It's a measure of the talent of the musicianship here too that neither sound dominates; tradition and contemporary elements perfectly complement each other in an album that reverentially plays with tradition.

New on the scene is Norwich-based **Kitewing** with their self-titled debut (Kitewing ★★★). Fiddles, guitar, mandolin and banjo provide the soundtrack in a mainly instrumental release, though there are some fine songs present as well. The album explores themes relating to the environment, the sea and migration, offering a beautifully realised, fresh and charming listening experience – a stirring new addition to the contemporary folk scene.

Welsh alternative country/folk/rock band **Cowbois Rhos Botwnnog**'s sixth album ***Mynd â'r Tŷ Am Dro*** (Sbrigyn Ymborth ★★★), is a contemplative and heartfelt slice of eclecticism. The mostly self-penned songs and tunes explore themes relating to home, love and family, demonstrating the maturity of the band. Featuring guitars, keyboards, drums and vocals the three brothers Iwan, Aled and Dafydd Hughes, along with accompanying musicians, deliver an album that builds on the trio's earlier, rockier work with a sound that is mature yet occasionally still manages to break a sweat.

Kitewing

Maddyx Goodall

Created from his University of Edinburgh Traditional Musician in Residence post, ***One Great Circle*** (Tanar Records ★★★★), from multi-instrumentalist and low whistle wizard **Fraser Fifield (with Chris Sout and Catriona McKay)** presents a dazzling and exquisite set of tunes. Inspired by the life of '*Aberdeen-born storyteller, ballad singer and [traveller] Stanley Robertson*' and composed by Fifield, with his regular collaborators harp-fiddle duo, McKay and Stout in mind, *One Great Circle* is a delight, showcasing the close friendship of the trio and the elegant soundscape possible from whistle, smallpipes, harp and fiddle.

Finally, celebrating two decades as a genuine Scottish supergroup, **Session A9** (named after the major road that cuts through Scotland from Falkirk to Thurso), mark their anniversary with ***The Magic Roundabout*** (Session A9 ★★★★). Despite heading into their third decade, the band's enthusiasm, energy and sheer delight in playing together remain as invigorating and inspiring as ever. If you like fiery fiddles (four in all), and a thrilling mix of *strathspeys*, waltzes and reels, then you can't go wrong here. Here's to the next 20 years!

Arrkula Yinbayarra
Waralungku

EM Media & Events

★★★★½

Back in 2013, Darwin-based Indigenous Australian singer-songwriter Shellie Morris released the album *Together We Are Strong – Ngambala Wiji Li-Wunungu: The Song People's Sessions* – a two-disc collaboration with the Borroloola Songwomen. Hailing from their small remote community in the Gulf of Carpentaria region of the Northern Territory, it was an emotional opportunity for the award-winning Morris to return to her grandmother's country, and finally learn her family's Yanyuwa language – Shellie was adopted as a baby and raised by a non-Indigenous family in Sydney.

A decade on, this new album, *Warralangku*, consists of ten songs, with the Arrkula Yinbayarra group, and features four endangered languages: Yanyuwa, Garrwa, Gudanji and Marra. All the songs were written by local women, and '*dedicated to reclaiming their languages for future generations,*' in order to preserve and promote their unique cultural heritage.

Borroloola singer Marlene Karkadoo, who had a dream to create this new collection of songs after the 2013 release, said, "Some of the ladies had never sung before, and none of us have had a career like Shellie… We wanted to come together and shine a spotlight on these languages that are dying out, and we want the young people and the world to hear them and our stories."

SETH JORDAN

TRACK TO TRY ***All Together We Sing***

Dagar Brothers
Berlin 1964 – Live & Berlin 1964 – The Lost Studio Recordings

Black Truffle I

★★★★★

A double archival release from Black Truffle, these very rare recordings feature the brothers Moinuddin (d1966) and Aminuddin Dagar (d2000), often referred to as the 'senior' Dagars to distinguish them from younger descendants, all renowned performers of *dhrupad*. An ancient Indian classical vocal tradition which is considered to be one of the world's oldest song styles, dhrupad contains very little embellishment, retaining its emphasis on the purity of the musical note. It remained the dominant vocal style at royal courts for hundreds of years but its popularity waned during the 18th and 19th centuries when more ornamental styles were coming into vogue. Its revival in the mid-20th century was largely due to the Dagar family which had persevered with this toughest of vocal genres by rigorous training along patrilineal lines.

Dhrupad was first heard in the Western world when the senior Dagar Brothers toured Europe in 1964. This was organised by pioneering musicologist Alain Daniélou and documented by UNESCO's *A Musical Anthology of the Orient* collection. The live recording is from this same tour where, accompanied by Moinuddin's wife, Saiyur, on *tanpura* (drone) and Raja Chatrapati Singh on *pakhawaj* (a large double-headed drum), the brothers present two full *ragas* in their hallmark meditational style with extended *alap* sections, where the notes of the raga are gradually introduced

SPICE RACK *EXPLORING MUSIC FROM SOUTH ASIA AND ITS DIASPORA*

by Dhruva Balram

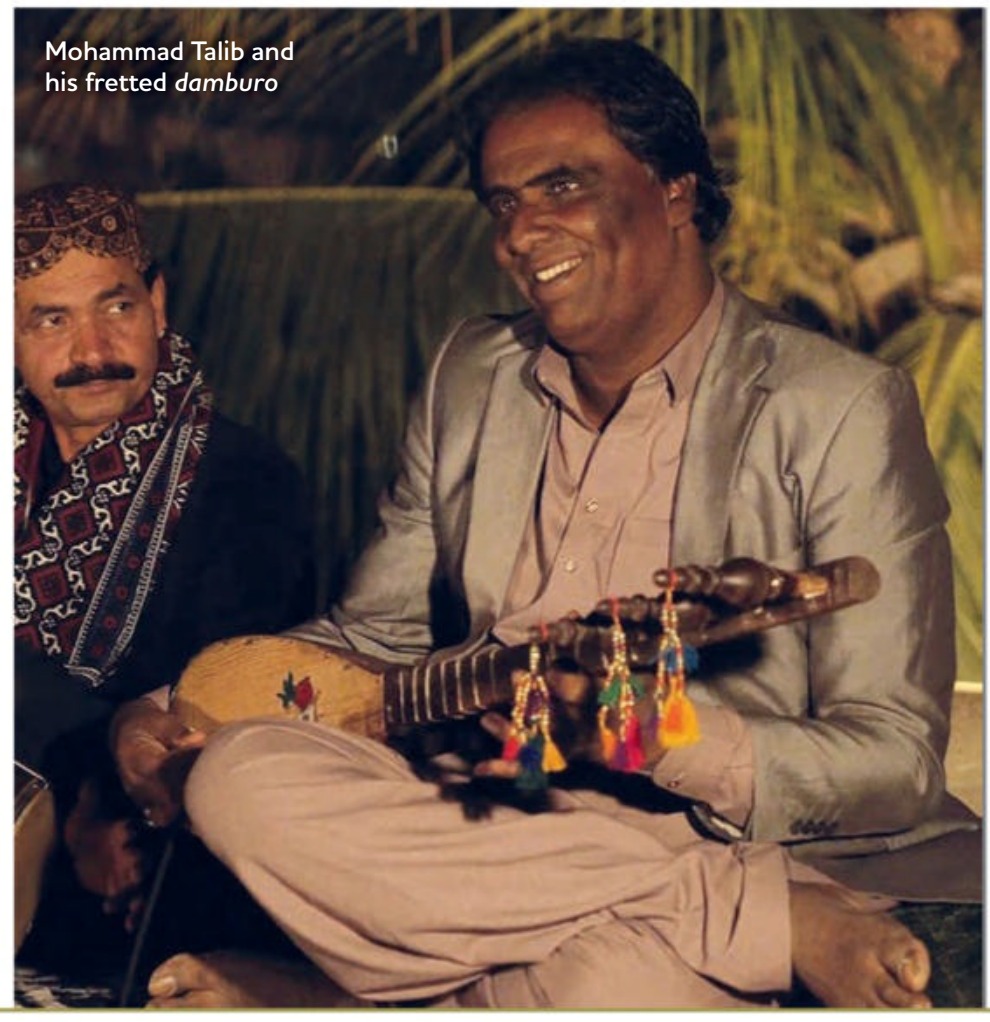
In 2022, Pakistan-based label honiunhoni released the five-track *Jingul* by 78-year-old *benju* maestro, Ustad Noor Bakhsh, from the Makran coast of Balochistan. It was a project that sounded like nothing else in the contemporary landscape. Upon its release, *Jingul* ballooned, gathering a fervent fanbase on Bandcamp, which led to Noor Bakhsh travelling Europe on a 25-city tour. But, his story is the first of many the founder of honiunhoni, Daniyal Ahmed, aims to spotlight.

On the latest release from honiunhoni, *Aap Ka Number Hai?* (Is this Your Number?) by Talib Trio, Muhammad Talib, a multi-instrumentalist, composer and educator from Karachi, plays two experimental instruments: the fretted *damburo* (his invention) and the electric *bulbul* (a variant of the benju). It is a hypnotic and arresting ten-track project.

Accompanied by Muhammad Khan on the *dholak* and Shahid Ali on the harmonium, Talib weaves together melodies that are rich and colourful. At times, they are spiritual, as if the trio are attempting to access another realm. With no vocals throughout *Aap Ka Number Hai?*, it is a haven for instrumentation to flourish, and it sizzles. With its many twists and turns, 'Roohdari' is an instant standout while 'Shinwari Lawangeena' brings a softness, yearning for people to dance. 'Karoo'n' is a frenetic composition while the subtle rhythm shifts in 'Jharh' and 'Gunkali' evoke devotional prayers. It's rare for an artist to release something with no faults, yet here is a folk album doing that.

Throughout *Aap Ka Number Hai?*, there is clean precision, as if everything is structured how it should be, so it is surprising when Ahmed notes that it was recorded on the rooftop of the apartment where he was born. '*The entire community of the building worked and celebrated with us, as we braved to record with Karachi's noise, a permanent texture on this record*,' the liner notes explain.

Ahmed has spent the last few years discovering looked-over and oft-forgotten artists, archiving and capturing these artists' stories. They are at their most natural with him, and Ahmed profiles them with genuine admiration. As a result, the label's social media has become one of those rare sites on the internet: a fun place to stay, explore and spend time.



Mohammad Talib and his fretted *damburo*

Talib hails from one of the most important musical families of Sindh. His uncle, the esteemed Ustad Muhammad Juman, stood as a pillar in Sindhi music and classical singing. Talib's musical journey started with inheriting the damburo, a long-necked lute, from his father, who excelled in playing the *surinda*, a bowed lute. Under the tutelage of Ghulam Mohammad, also known as Ghulamu, a maestro in Sindhi benju tradition, Talib honed his skills before studying composition under the guidance of the acclaimed film composer Niaz Ahmed.

It was Ghulamu who sparked something in Talib's mind, suggesting that the damburo could transcend its traditional role as a rhythmic accompaniment. Introducing frets opened avenues for Talib to explore the instrument differently, enabling him to weave melodies and harmonies on an instrument primarily designed for rhythmic drone.

In *Aap Ka Number Hai?*, Talib performs original compositions, renditions of his uncle's work and reinterpretations of Sindhi, Balochi and even Pashto classics. While Khan's dholak maintains a propulsive rhythm, Ali's harmonium is melancholic throughout. Talib's melodies, possessing hope and joy, the two twirling in tandem, fit neatly in here, allowing the project to weave through multiple emotional layers.

This album demands concentration and re-listening. Pay attention and you'll hear, at the end of each track, Ahmed's voice, full of genuine excitement, exclaiming delight at what he is witnessing. The least we can do is give it the time it deserves.

Shellie Morris & the *Arrkula Yinbayarra* choir at Daminmin Arts & Cultural Festival 2023

Paz Tassone

in lower octaves before the rhythmic tempo intensifies. It's a rare treat to hear the senior Dagar Brothers at their peak but another, previously unheard and hidden treasure is also released alongside this concert recording. *The Lost Studio Recordings*, also made in Berlin in 1964/65, features a full-length 'Raga Malkauns', a haunting late-night raga which is said to have the power to summon spirits from other worlds. Accompanied by detailed liner notes and archival images, this is Indian classical music at its purest and best.

JAMEELA SIDDIQI

TRACK TO TRY *Raga Malkauns* from *Berlin 1964 – The Lost Studio Recordings*

Ensemble Hougaku Shijyuusoudan
The Art of Sankyoku

Ocora

★★★★½

Japanese musicians have few competitors when it comes to sustaining traditions while subtly updating them for today. Traditions are rarely static entities, hence, although the tracks here have antecedents going back centuries, three are compositions from the 19th-century Edo period. One is an arrangement of an old folksong written around the turn of the 20th century and associated with a northern province, and one is a recent composition by the celebrated Toshi Ichiyanagi (1933–2022). All but one fit the *sankyoku* genre: a trio of the eponymous *shakuhachi* flute, *koto* zither and *shamisen* lute, over which vocals are sprinkled. Sankyoku became popular during the Meiji era (1868–1912) as modernisation discarded age-old musicians' guilds and the peregrinating shakuhachi-playing monks, and introduced a new urban concert culture. The trio on this album (curiously, their name translates as a quartet) are Reison Kuroda on shakuhachi, and Noriko Hirata and Yuiko Terai who play both koto and shamisen and also sing. Together and individually all three musicians now serve as ambassadors for Japan abroad. While the plucked shamisen is something of an acquired taste, the blends achieved by the trio are magical and evocative. The solo shakuhachi in 'Oushu Sashi' is unmissable, and Ichiyanagi's 'Transfiguration of Flowers' brilliantly blends old techniques with avant-garde tremolos, chords, and improvisatory flurries.

KEITH HOWARD

TRACK TO TRY *Oushu Sashi*

Sabri Brothers
Jami

Piranha Records

★★★★★

This album is a double dedication, firstly to the 15th-century Sufi poetry of Jami, and secondly to the *qawwali* master Haji Ghulam Farid Sabri (d1994) and his son Amjad, who was murdered in 2016. This is qawwali at its raw best, the large, powerful, deep voices of the Sabri family singers, especially that of Ghulam Farid, capable of the soaring lines that are such a feature of the genre. The album starts off in fine form with 'Az Hoosné Malihe Khud' (all the tracks are sung in Farsi, and the language's poetic beauty is clear even for non-speakers) and although the tempo picks up in the middle of the song, it never gets away from a very musical restraint, a feature of all the tracks here. The second track ('Tanam Farsuda Jan') features fine solo melismatic singing before the collective ensemble join in, while 'Jahan Roshan Ast' shows off the singers' virtuosic talent. The album finishes with the antiphonal 'Ba Shogat Jan Ba Alab', with more fine singing. While this might lack some of the real fireworks of other qawwali recordings, it is very fine indeed with a musical finesse that lets more of the text come through.

MARIA LORD

TRACK TO TRY *Tanam Farsuda Jan*

ok by Jazzland

Moksha "Embracing"
moksha-oslo.bandcamp.com

Tundra Electro "Mountain of Ancestors"
tundraelectro.bandcamp.com

Canberk Ulas "Echoes of Becoming"
canberkulas.bandcamp.com

okworldrec.com
okworldrecords.bandcamp.com/music

TOP OF THE WORLD
TRACK 1

Aynur
Rabe
Aynur / Dreyer Gaido

★★★★½

The title of this album, *Rabe*, means 'stand-up' or 'rise-up' in Kurdish and Aynur Doğan has been standing up for her people for 20 years since her Kalan Müzik debut *Keçe Kurdan* in 2004. This is her eighth album and one of her strongest. It begins with just saxophone and Aynur's powerful vocals, although the sax phrase has the reedy mystical air of a *duduk*. A couple of the songs have spiritual lyrics written by Alevi poets, including the excellent 'Derviş Baba' (Father Dervish) which includes the plucked *pipa* of Wu Man. Wu Man also joins on the delicate 'Bîranîn' (Remembering). 'Rabe Edlayê' (Rise Up Edlayê) is a traditional song of unattainable love. It includes Kurdish *tembur* and other lutes plus incisive strings making it one of the stand-out tracks. Snarky Puppy's Michael League joins on electric guitar and jazz pianist Franz von Chossy contributes too, although with the exception of tracks like 'Ez û Bi Teva' (Me and You), one of the Aynur originals, happily the Kurdish flavour dominates that of jazz.

As she's always done, Turkish-born Aynur keeps away from overt political statements, but *Rabe* certainly reinforces her role as the leading contemporary female Kurdish voice.

SIMON BROUGHTON

TRACK TO TRY *Rabe Edlayê*

Tarek Abdallah & Adel Shams El Din
Ousoul
Buda Musique / Socadisc

★★★★½

Born in Alexandria and based in France, *oud*-player and composer Tarek Abdallah is a scholar of traditional Arabic music. Much like his 2015 album with Adel Shams El Din, *Wasla,* this new effort draws creative inspiration from musical styles performed in the Middle East in the first half of the 20th century, a time of Arabic cultural renaissance called the Nahda era. It sees him again accompanied by master *riqq* (percussive tambourine) player Adel Shams El Din on a set of original compositions. Sparse and plaintively beautiful, the pair's music follows a system of melodic modes (*maqam*) while retaining space for modal improvisation (*taqsim*). Opener 'Agib (Étonnant)' features elegant violins while vocals accompany the final track 'Ya Qalbahu'. But it's the austere yet beguiling sound of the pair's intertwining instruments that makes the music here so memorable and evocative. Often utilising previously abandoned traditional rhythmic cycles, they offer a window into a near-vanished musical world.

PAUL BOWLER

TRACK TO TRY *Selsal*

Ahmad Al Khatib & Kaveh Mahmudiyan
Hiva
Global Sonics

★★★½☆

Ahmad Al Khatib and Kaveh Mahmudiyan have created *Hiva*, an album of traditional Ottoman-styled *oud* and percussion commissioned by Global Oslo Music in 2023. It's needless to say, the oud is omnipresent in traditional Middle Eastern music, but what isn't as well known is the presence of the *tombak*, an Iranian hand drum that is the sole form of rhythm on *Hiva*, played by Kaveh Mahmudiyan. The music bases itself on classical Arabic structures as well as folk music, which means it contains a nice juxtaposition of styles. Though there are only six tracks, the album is just under an hour long with two tracks over ten minutes long and plenty of evolution within each composition. Opening track 'Hiva' feels like three tracks in one, as there are different sections within – one where the oud is dominant, one featuring the frenetic finger-tapping of the tombak, and another where both instruments interplay. And that seems to be the formula and also its sticking

Muhsin Akgün

point, as there's not a lot of variation beyond this. An enjoyable listen but not particularly groundbreaking.

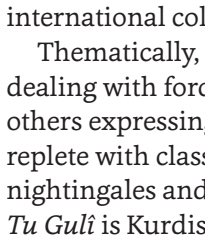
YOUSIF NUR

TRACK TO TRY *Hiva*

Olcay Bayir
Tu Gulî

ARC Music

★★★☆☆



Olcay Bayir is a British/Kurdish-Alevi singer-songwriter who sings in Kurdish, Turkish and Armenian, and *Tu Gulî* is her third album, within which she reflects on her multicultural and multilingual upbringing, gives voice to the myriad peoples of Anatolia and their struggles, and pays respect to the women of her homeland.

The line-up is a mix of traditional Anatolian instruments with guitar, double bass and bass guitar; and the combination creates a worldly sound but is perhaps more Eastern in timbre than her previous album. The inter-tonal qualities of *saz* (Turkish lute) blend seamlessly with Bayir's mellifluous vocals. Her vocals are supported by *duduk* (double-reed wind instrument) on 'Adana' and *oud* (Turkish/Arabic fretless lute) on 'Tal Tala' and 'Nare Nare'. The fact that only the vocals were recorded in London, while the other parts were laid down in Athens, Istanbul and Yerevan marks this out as a truly international collaboration.

Thematically, there are two songs dealing with forced marriage and others expressing unrequited love; replete with classic imagery of roses, nightingales and gardens at night. *Tu Gulî* is Kurdish for 'You are a Rose' and it is this sentiment that is perhaps extended to all the people of Anatolia or, even the whole region itself.

TOM NEWELL

TRACK TO TRY *Husna*

Itamar Erez & Hamin Honari
Migrant Voices

Itamar Erez

★★★☆☆

Migrant Voices is a collaboration between two immigrants to Canada who discovered each other through the global music scene in Vancouver. Itamar Erez, a composer and guitarist from Israel whose vocabulary spans Middle Eastern music, jazz and flamenco; and Hamin Honari, an Iranian multi-percussionist. After an established rapport playing duo performances, the pair spent two days in the studio recording mostly unplanned improvisations, the results of which form the present album. 'Departure' is a strong opener, with Erez' intervallic patterns dancing across Honari's loping grooves. The title-track is the sole pre-composed piece, and benefits from the inherent structure this brings. Basing the music around an intriguing, folk-like melody, Erez deftly replicates the ornaments of near-Eastern string instruments on nylon-string guitar, to beautiful effect.

'Forgotten Sands' is the only track to feature any overdubs, with Erez reinforcing his guitar playing with added *bandola*. While the playing from both performers is never less than impeccable – with Erez calling on his jazz and classical background to produce some compelling harmonic language – some of the material has a tendency to meander, owing to its spontaneous nature. Closing track 'Mirage' ends abruptly, cutting the album off at around the 28-minute mark, resulting in a somewhat unsatisfying end to a musically and emotionally rich, yet insubstantial album.

CHARLIE CAWOOD

TRACK TO TRY *Migrant Voices*

Canberk Ulas

TOP OF THE WORLD
TRACK 6

Canberk Ulas
Echoes of Becoming

Jazzland Recordings

★★★★☆

Born in Turkey and residing in Sweden, Canberk Ulas is a player and maker of the Armenian *duduk*, an ancient double reed woodwind instrument popular for its soft, mournful quality. On *Echoes of Becoming*, Ulas draws on Turkish, Anatolian, Armenian and Ottoman traditions and blends them with contemporary influences, such as electronic looping, extended techniques and digital post-processing. What results is a deeply reflective meditation on transformation and authenticity, which describes Ulas' personal journey from despair to self-discovery. The yearning sound of the duduk is the perfect vehicle for this abstracted narrative, serving as a constant sonic protagonist among the gradually shifting soundscapes. Ulas is joined by multiple guest musicians – on trumpet, electric guitar, live sampling, piano and voice – each of whom contribute subtly and tastefully to the arrangements. The most prominent of these is Benedikte Kløw Askedalen, who sings in both English and Turkish on 'I Came from Far Away' – a haunting refrain that sees Ulas' duduk settle into a supporting role behind Askedalen's layered vocals, on what for many will be the album's emotional centrepiece. While the tone of the album is largely one of melancholy, there is a thread of optimism running through *Echoes of Becoming*, as it resides in a liminal space of quiet introspection, before gently forging towards new beginnings.

CHARLIE CAWOOD

TRACK TO TRY *Kristiansand*

Maliheh Moradi & Ehsan Matoori
Our Sorrow

ARC Music

★★★☆☆

The sorrow referred to here is that of the women of Iran who, among many other things, are forbidden to sing solo in public. For singers such as Maliheh Moradi, these restrictions are too much to bear; and they have led to many, including herself, leaving Iran. Since her departure as a young woman, Moradi has had great success, performing at international music festivals, appearing in operas and, after moving to the US, becoming part of the *Voices Unveiled* project. On this album, Moradi joins forces with composer and *santur* (dulcimer) player Ehsan Matoori who, since also relocating to the US, has collaborated with musicians from a wide range of backgrounds – from *tabla* players to symphony orchestras.

Our Sorrow is a collection of original compositions by Matoori which explore various stages in the life of Moradi as a conduit for the examination of the plight of Iranian women in general. The performances are virtuosic and engaging, with a narrative feel, yet the beauty of Moradi's vocals is sometimes challenged by jarring unison string lines. While the album consists mainly of traditional Iranian textures, some of the most interesting moments include more international influences such as the clearly jazz aesthetic of 'Six Doors'.

TOM NEWELL

TRACK TO TRY *Six Doors*

Aili
Nandakke?

Eskimo Recordings

★★★★½

Following the warm reception that greeted the release of their 2021 debut EP *Dansu*, Japanese/Belgian duo Aili return with their first full-length album. Formed around the musical partnership between singer Aili Maruyama and producer Orson Wouters, Aili's music is an exuberant electronic pop, with elements of electro and house music. On the surface, *Nandakke?* (a Japanese word that loosely translates to 'Well, What was It?') is an album full of energy and euphoria – replete with vintage synthesizers, drum machines and samples – that delights in Japanese pop culture, fashion and food. Under this glossy veneer, there lies a deeper emotional complexity that approaches the bittersweet. Having left her native Tokyo aged seven, Maruyama has since dealt with the feeling of disconnection this cultural separation brings, manifesting in the language she uses for songwriting, which is a unique mixture of French and Japanese. The opening title-track explores this theme of communication, in this case between Maruyama and her father, in their shared navigation across physical and linguistic barriers. 'Babychan' is a quirky love song, in which the pair directly translate Dutch idioms into Japanese sentences, creating a surreal confusion of language that reflects the awkward first pangs of romance. Imbued with a vibrant sense of fun, while simultaneously playing with themes of separation and belonging, *Nandakke?* is a strong debut album filled with personality.

CHARLIE CAWOOD

TRACK TO TRY *Takoyaki*

Liam Bailey
Zero Grace

Big Crown Records

★★★½☆

Born in Nottingham with an English mum and Jamaican dad, Liam Bailey grew up listening to reggae, soul and rock – to Dillinger, The Supremes and Hendrix – and all those childhood influences can be found in his melodic, wide-ranging and sometimes quirky songs. He has had a lengthy and colourful career that has included recordings for Amy Winehouse's label, but he now seems happy to stick with the New York producer Leon Michels who worked on both this and his debut album, *Ekundayo*, four years ago. It's tempting to describe Bailey as a reggae artist, as that's what he does best and is the style that dominates many of his best songs. But he has a very individual reggae style. It ranges from the light, bubbly, soulful and tuneful 'Sekkle Down' to the cheerful 'Dance With Me', which mixes retro pop with reggae and soul. Then there's the personal, intense, reggaeton-influenced 'Mercy Tree', with its memories of racism from his childhood, and the upbeat and melodic 'Canary in the Coal Mine'. Elsewhere he switches to rock, with unremarkable guitar riffs on the opening two tracks, but twanging guitar and more pained childhood memories on the rough and ready 'Disorder Starts at Home', and a grand, melodic ballad 'Winter is Within Thee'. An interesting set – but skip those first tracks.

ROBIN DENSELOW

TRACK TO TRY *Dance With Me*

TOP OF THE WORLD TRACK 4

Avalanche Kaito
Talitakum

Glitterbeat Records

★★★★½

Avalanche Kaito's 2022 self-titled debut was a triumph of noise punk indelibly informed by *griot* music from Burkina Faso. Since then, relentless live shows and a slightly reworked line-up (bass replaced by guitar) have evolved the Franco-Belgo-Burkinabé trio's sound. This time, their music feels a little more considered. It's just as foreboding, abrasive and hypnotic, but the anarchic chaos is replaced by something more direct and focussed.

Each of the nine tracks on *Talitakum* has a unique sound that complements the album as a whole – it can go from glitch trap on one to Touareg Beefheart punk on the next. It is the attitude that unites them, the complex creativity of three musicians in simpatico, the delicious contrasts of frontman Kaito Winse's beautiful voice against the harsh discords of distorted guitar and synth, the declamatory *tama* (talking drum) against the crashing drum kit.

The world of Avalanche Kaito no longer feels like a rattling, angry machine constantly on the verge of losing control, instead like a purposeful, powerful elemental spirit that creates through destruction. That change is for neither better nor worse, but it shows that this is a group that mutate and adapt and grow with experience, and will always have something new to say.

JIM HICKSON

TRACK TO TRY *Shoya*

James Elkington & Nathan Salsburg
All Gist

Paradise of Bachelors

★★★★½

All Gist, the third album by duelling acoustic guitarists James Elkington and Nathan Salsburg, is an eminently enjoyable, ten-track collection of compelling original compositions and imaginatively reworked covers. Working in the tradition of exploratory artists like Jansch & Renbourn, John Fahey and Daniel Bachman, Chicago-based Englishman Elkington and Kentuckian Salsburg are keen to push the fingerstyle repertoire into fresh territory. *All Gist* begins with the sweetly ebbing flow of 'Death Wishes to Kill' (a phrase from a novel by eccentric British author T F Powys), featuring the guitars in splendid accordance, soon complemented by Palestine-born Wanees Zarour's exquisite violin, which swirls in *raga*-like harmony around the theme. 'Numb Limbs' showcases the duo's superlative songwriting skills, fingerstyle chops and simpatico artistry. 'Nicest Distinction,' a three-part ballad, walks a delicate melodic line that upshifts into a mellifluous revelry graced by Wednesday Knudsen's '*ethereal woodwinds.' All Gist*'s three covers consist of a suitably elegiac

Lyon Tom

performance of Howard Skempton's 'Well, Well, Cornelius'; a marvellous intertwining of two traditional Breton dance tunes titled 'Rule Bretagne'; and a remarkably winsome rendition of 'Buffalo Stance,' Neneh Cherry's 1988 pop chart topper.

DOUG DELOACH

TRACK TO TRY *Death Wishes to Kill*

Ibibio Sound Machine
Pull the Rope

Merge

★★★★½

Ibibio Sound Machine started out ten years ago with a self-titled album that matched gospel, West African styles and electronic effects against songs from the British/Nigerian singer Eno Williams that were based on folk stories from South-East Nigeria. Since then the band have moved on to concentrate on contemporary electronica and dance styles, and for this set they have teamed up with producer Ross Orton, who has worked with the Arctic Monkeys. According to the band's co-leader and co-songwriter Max Grunhard, Orton "is more grounded in rave and grungier sounds," and the result is an album of stomping electronica and Afro-funk that is transformed by Williams' highly personal, no-nonsense singing. She has an impressively versatile voice, at times matching rousing, chanting vocals against the slick, rhythmic bass work on the title-track or 'Fire', but then bringing a more intimate message to the dance floor. On 'Got To Be Who U Are' she gives advice to listeners in both London and Africa, while on the thoughtful dance song 'Political Incorret' (*sic*) she contemplates social media and laments '*we don't talk any more*.' There's more danceable good advice on 'Let My Yes Be Yes', and she slows down for the lighter, soulful 'Touch the Ceiling'. Another personal song, 'Far Away', features brass and slinky keyboard line that echoes Stevie Wonder's 'Superstition'. Ibibio Sound Machine will be worth checking out at the summer festivals.

ROBIN DENSELOW

TRACK TO TRY *Political Incorret*

Kolonel Djafaar
Getaway

Batov Records

★★★★½

Brice Bottin

The simplest and most common description of Kolonel Djafaar's sound is as a meeting of Ethio-jazz and Afrobeat. And that's true: the Ethiopian side is clear in those distinctive pentatonic scales, the Nigerian in the use of the small but meaty horn section (baritone and tenor saxophones, trumpet, occasional trombone), and the rhythms are a tight mix of Yoruba and Afro-Latin styles beloved of Fela and Mulatu, respectively. There's a lot more to *Getaway* than that, though. There's also a potent strain of Anatolian-Levantine psycho-surf, fluttering in through guitar and synth lines, and delving deeper, there are nods to reggae, Cuban jazz, Baobab-esque West African dance band, and even an unsettling fairground waltz.

Just reading this list of musical ingredients, you might ho-hum. None of these individual fusions are particularly novel or untested; we've heard them before. But here they're polished to a cinematic shine, with no element clashing against the rest. It's very tidy, and it's all neatly encapsulated in the opener, 'Urban Dweller' – a great intro to the album, showing off the breadth of the band's explorations without feeling overloaded. The album ends on a pretty abrupt fade-out, a small disappointment when it feels like Kolonel Djafaar could jam out for much longer.

JIM HICKSON

TRACK TO TRY *Urban Dweller*

TOP OF THE WORLD TRACK 8

Bab L' Bluz
Swaken

Real World Records

★★★★★

In the few years between the release of their 2020 debut album *Nayda!* and *Swaken*, this hotly anticipated follow-up, Bab L' Bluz have become bona fide rock stars, thanks to an almost constant whirl of festival appearances and the sheer talent and charisma of the duo that is *awisha*-wielding Moroccan frontwoman Yousra Mansour and French electric *gimbri*-player/multi-instrumentalist Brice Bottin. Even more psychedelic and hard rocking than its predecessor, *Swaken* (a word loosely translated as the altered state between cognition and trance) draws as much from psychedelic blues, funk and AC/DC-style rock as it does from the propulsive rhythms of Northern Africa's Maghreb: Gnawa, Amazigh, *chaabi*, Hassani and Houara music. Interaction between instruments including guitars, *mandole*, *ribab* and *gimbris*, all electrified, between *qaraqab* castanets and, intriguingly, flutes, including the *peul* flute of Guinea Conakry, is bolstered by warm analogue production and deftly applied effects courtesy of Bottin and Real World Records' Katie May; Mansour's voice – melismatic, wide-ranging, take-no-prisoners powerful – feels like a call to arms, or at the very least, a call to hair-swirl and head-bang. Losing yourself to find yourself is the main theme here, evident on tracks such as the rollicking, Tamazight-language 'Imazighen', a celebration of ethnic diversity, and 'AmmA', a feminist anthem whose warrior vibe lingers. Marvellous.

JANE CORNWELL

TRACK TO TRY *Imazighen*

Fred Locks
Black Star Liner

VP Records

★★★★½

Disillusioned with the financial side of the Jamaican music industry after working with such harmony groups as The Lyrics (who recorded a version of 'Bridge over Troubled Water'), Stafford Eliot decided to change his life. He became a Rasta, living on the beach and growing the long dreadlocks that would earn him a new artistic moniker as Fred Locks. Inspired by his new faith, his 1975 single 'Black Star Liners' brought him cult status. It was followed the year after by the album *Black Star Liner / True Rastaman*, which has now been restored and remastered with the original stereo mix. It starts, of course, with the song that has become a deserved reggae classic, with its powerful, optimistic story of Black liberation and repatriation, with '*seven miles of Black Star liners coming in the harbour*.' This was the shipping line established by the controversial political activist Marcus Garvey, who talked of a return to Africa – and ▸

of course features in the song. The rest of the album follows much the same mood, with Locks showing off his relaxed, soulful singing on upbeat, melodic and easy-going Rasta anthems such as 'Vision of Redemption', 'True Rastaman' and 'Don't Let Babylon Use You'.

ROBIN DENSELOW

TRACK TO TRY *Black Star Liners*

Inês Loubet
Senga

Albert's Favourites

★★★☆☆

Portuguese singer-songwriter Inês Loubet spent five years travelling from Portugal through Brazil, to London, inspiring this, her debut album. It's a jazzy-samba compilation, featuring artists met on her travels and inspired, too, by live performances alongside MPB superstars Gilberto Gil and João Bosco. To say that the result is pleasant, easy listening might be damning with faint praise. With Loubet's velvety vocal tones, however, it has a catchy retro vibe, reminiscent of Brazil's ground-breaking *tropicália* era, evocative of the likes of Marisa Monte and Elis Regina.

As light and airy as she sounds, though, Inês Loubet sings from the heart, on deep themes in *Senga*; from love and grief to the essence of contemporary womanhood. Prominent Brazilian musicians on the album include percussionist Jansen Santana, bassist Julio de Castro and vocalist Peu Meurray. Plus, Ruta Sipola on flute; as well as Jake Burgess on tenor sax, and string instrumentalist Greg Sanders, a long-term collaborator from London.

All tracks are consistent and slick, if a tad repetitive. Single 'Olha o Rio' is a samba-rich tribute to the carnival of Rio de Janeiro and the stand-out 'Sab Sabim', sees Peu Meurray joining Loubet on vocals, creating harmonies of depth and vitality.

HUW HENNESSY

TRACK TO TRY *Sab Sabim*

TOP OF THE WORLD
TRACK 5

Las Lloronas
Out of the Blue

Muziekpublique

★★★★☆

It's reassuring that some things don't change. For their second album, the Brussels-based international trio of former street musicians follow the template of their delicious 2021 debut, *Soaked* (reviewed in *Songlines* #166): exquisite harmonies steeped in melancholy; spare, tasteful arrangements; a mix of song and slam poetry, sung and spoken in a dizzying range of languages; generic influences embracing klezmer, *chanson*, Iberian folk, jazz and more; echoes of artists like Lhasa de Sela and Rodrigo Amarante – all entwined by a delicate yet potent female sensibility. The accompaniment again takes the form of Sura Solomon's accordion and ukulele, Amber in 't Veld's acoustic guitar and Marieke Werner's velvety clarinet, backed intermittently by choral voices, double bass and a wistful trumpet. The result, as Las Lloronas acknowledge, is hard to define but highly distinctive. Just listen for starters to the mix of song and poetry on 'Run', or the mournful minor-key opener 'Belly Blue', or the a cappella 'Pequeña', or the sweetly simple 'Little Poets', and let it all flow.

As before, perhaps, but '*in this album we travel wider and deeper*,' Las Lloronas suggest, '*with humour, sensitivity and questions.*' My only question is: how far can a winning formula take them?

MARK SAMPSON

TRACK TO TRY *Little Poets*

Yinon Muallem & Saman Alias
2gether

Suznak Records

★★★☆☆

An intriguing meeting of two Iraqi Jewish artists who have spent years in Israel and Turkey (in the case of Yinon Muallem) and Iraq and Sweden (in the case of Saman Alias) – and met in Sweden to record this album. Muallem plays *oud*, fretless guitar and percussion – there's a fine oud solo on 'The Swing'. Alias plays clarinet, bass clarinet and *ney* flute – with infectious clarinet in 'Rast Gelsin'. The collaboration on *2gether* sounds natural and easygoing but tends much of the time to light jazz, particularly when pianist Johan Ericsson is involved. The nicest moments are when the lute and clarinet give us some modal *maqam* moments. The musicians describe the album as a journey, although don't give many clues to help us follow it. There are two tracks where Muallem adds vocals – one a trad Turkish song ('Dun Gece'), the other an original composition in English ('The Journey'). Neither are highlights. 'Geryan', the closing number, is a nice finish with filigree percussion.

SIMON BROUGHTON

TRACK TO TRY *Geryan*

Newen Afrobeat
Grietas

Lichens Family

★★★★½

Celebrating 15 years since their formation in Santiago, Newen Afrobeat present *Grietas*, their dynamic fifth studio album. Enriched by a collaboration with artists like Lido Pimienta, Dele Sosimi (of Fela Kuti's Egypt 80 band), Chico Cesar and Joe Vasconcellos, the 13-piece Chilean ensemble weave a vibrant tapestry of Afro-Latin influences, spirited rhythms, horn-infused melodies and socially-charged messages.

The title-track, meaning 'cracks', stands out as a potent call for environmental protection. The song is elevated by Lido Pimienta's sublime voice, her unique tone adding extra spice to an already exhilarating composition as she interjects on the inequality faced by the communities most vulnerable to global warming. The opening guitar, reminiscent of Touareg desert blues, suddenly transitions into Newen Afrobeat's signature Afro-Latin soundscape, highlighted by mesmerising saxophone licks. 'Mare Mare' features climactic progressions and intense flute motifs, while 'Widin' explores a funkier ambience, peppered with electric guitar bends and bass riffs. 'Lloverá' unfolds as a musical tug-of-war, shifting between Afrobeat intensity and softer Latin pop sounds during the verses.

Grietas solidifies Newen Afrobeat's role as global Afrobeat ambassadors, proudly infusing their Latin roots into their music. Beyond showcasing their

Maria Lorente Becerra

musical prowess, the album serves as a rhythmic manifesto and a testament to their unwavering dedication to social and environmental activism.

LUCY HALLAM

TRACK TO TRY *Grietas*

Nubiyan Twist
Find Your Flame

Strut Records

★★★★½

When artists pile on the special guests, sometimes you wish they wouldn't. However, this nine-piece powerhouse from Leeds have managed to retain on their fourth album the clarity and coherence of 2019's defining *Jungle Run*. For all the valid contributions of established stars like Seun Kuti, Nile Rodgers and, arguably most successfully, Mamani Keïta, along with emerging talents like MC NEONE the Wonderer and vocalists Ria Moran, corto.alto and long-time Ghanaian collaborator K.O.G., the core outfit stay true to a signature sound pitched somewhere between acid jazz and the neo-soul of Erykah Badu and co. Nubiyan Twist have supported Ebo Taylor and Tony Allen, so the highlife and *soukous* of 'Pray For Me Part 2 (feat K.O.G.)', the Malian sheen of 'Slow Breath (feat Mamani Keïta)' and the Afrobeat of 'Carry Me (feat Seun Kuti) are no mere affectations.

Referring to various struggles in recent years, bandleader and producer Tom Excell suggests that "the collaborative process helped reignite a liberating fire of resistance in each of us." No doubt. Ultimately, though, it's *Find Your Flame*'s basic ingredients – the smooth grooves, jazzy horns, strong melodies and sheer collective class – that confirm why Nubiyan Twist never actually lost that titular flame.

MARK SAMPSON

TRACK TO TRY *Slow Breath (feat Mamani Keita)*

Old Spot, Jeri Foreman & Ruth Eliza
One Night String Band Vol One

Scribe Records

★★★½☆

The story of how *One Night String Band* came together is worth recounting. Because of gig conflicts, two old-time duos – Old Spot (Rowan Piggot on fiddle, Joe Banks on banjo, guitar and double bass) and Jeri Foreman & Ruth Eliza (fiddle and banjo, respectively) – who love each other's work never get to hear each other play. Solution: schedule a week-long joint tour of North England and, during rehearsals, hang out until the wee hours swigging whisky and playing music together – and don't forget to turn on the tape recorder. The result is an old-time string band lover's delight. Standout tracks from the short (26+ minutes) but sweet session include 'I'll Reap What I've Sown', a foot-stomping barn dance banger featuring brilliant instrumental harmonising, and 'Pterodactyl', which the band describes as '*a crooked tune written on banjo by Ruth, about running so fast that you're flying like a pterodactyl.*' Suffice it to say, it's a reel (and an album) worth hearing.

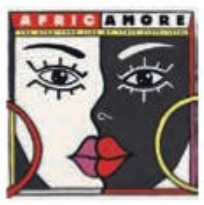
DOUG DELOACH

TRACK TO TRY *I'll Reap What I've Sown*

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Africamore – The Afro-Funk Side of Italy (1973-1978)

Four Flies Records

★★☆☆☆



While it's possible to sleep on nylon sheets, you'd really rather not. Similarly, the experience of listening to the synthetic African dance music of *Africamore* is none too comfortable. That's partly because our ears have become attuned over recent decades to the real thing. This compilation goes back to a time when it was in less plentiful supply. The catalyst for the Italian Afro-funk music in question was Manu Dibango's evergreen 'Soul Makossa', the song that launched a score or more of imitations (such as studio band African Revival's decent cover, included here and Albert Verrecchia, of Weyman Corporation's, chortling 'Kumbayero'). In the context of the contemporary disco scene, some of the dozen chosen cuts on *Africamore* are quite decent – Jamaican-born Beryl Cunningham, for example, transforms Nat King Cole's 'Calypso Blues' into 'Why O', a percussion-rich, quasi-Hamilton Bohannon stomper – but it's a shock to learn that Osibisa supplied the rhythm section for the rather excruciating 'Amore' by husband-and-wife team, Chrisma. Lest anyone should need to boogie down to a song about the food we eat, Augusto Martelli & The Real Mc Coy pile on some seriously funky 'Calories'. Altogether, though, I can't imagine that there will be much call for *Africamore – The Afro-funk Side of Italy* outside of Italy itself.

MARK SAMPSON

TRACK TO TRY *Why O* by Beryl Cunningham

Produced by
FLAMENCO FESTIVAL
Angel
sadlerswells.com
Summer of passion
★★★★
The Guardian
★★★★
The Times
★★★★
The Independent
Flamenco Festival
Sadler's Wells
SADLERSWELLS
4 - 15 June
with the support of
inaem
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND
Image by Chris Nash

MY WORLD

Frank Cottrell-Boyce

Russ Slater Johnson speaks to the screenwriter and author about Irish jigs, anti-recruiting songs and how a scouser gave Manchester a city motto

"Oh god, how do you know about that?" replies Frank Cottrell-Boyce when I mention his time in the Liverpool punk band Dead Trout. "Unfortunately, it's on your Wikipedia page," I respond. Born in Bootle, near Liverpool, in 1959, Cottrell-Boyce was at the right age when punk hit, and he became part of the scene in Liverpool and a regular at Eric's Club. "Bands kind of came and went or morphed into something else," he recalls, naming Big in Japan, Dalek I Love You and Dead Birds as contemporaries. "Loads of those bands became huge, like Frankie Goes to Hollywood."

Yet, these aren't his formative musical influences, for those you have to go back further. "You know the earliest banger – to use that word – I can remember would be television themes like 'Top Cat'. I'd get so excited when I heard that," he says enthusiastically. "Oliver Postgate was the most punk of all," he quips about the creator of children's shows such as *Bagpuss* and *Clangers*.

Children's TV and punk may seem odd bedfellows, but they do give an inkling of Cottrell-Boyce's career as a writer and the sheer breadth of his work. He started out in TV, writing for *Brookside* and *Coronation Street* in the 80s and 90s. In 1990, he teamed up with director Michael Winterbottom on a TV movie, *Forget About Me*, the tale of two Scottish squaddies making their way to Budapest to see a Simple Minds concert. It was with Winterbottom that he would make his name as a screenwriter, the two of them working together on a string of critical successes: *Butterfly Kiss* (1995), *Welcome to Sarajevo* (1997), *24 Hour Party People* (2002), *Code46* (2003) and *A Cock and Bull Story* (2005). Other films he has written or co-written include *Hilary and Jackie* (1998), *Millions* (2004), *The Railway Man* (2013), *Goodbye Christopher Robin* (2017) and, his most recent, this year's *The Beautiful Game*, starring Bill Nighy and inspired by the true story of the Homeless World Cup. He's also carved out a sister career as an award-winning children's author, and wrote the opening ceremony for the 2012 Summer Olympics in London.

We hone in on two of his films whose subjects revolve around music. *Hilary and Jackie* told the story of celebrated cellist Jacqueline du Pré from the perspective of her sister. Remembering why he wrote the film, Cottrell-Boyce says: "I just thought it was an amazing story about childhood and sisterhood, it's a film about family, and I was also really drawn to that music. I remember seeing her on telly [when I was young] and thinking, wow, that sound is so deep and it's so old, this incredible mournful, ancient sound, and she looks so young, you know, there's something magical about that." From there, we go to *24 Hour Party People* – "they're two ends of the musical spectrum," says Cottrell-Boyce – his story of the Manchester music scene in the 80s focused on Tony Wilson, the founder of Factory Records and the Hacienda nightclub and a TV presenter on Granada. "It was a celebration of local television as much as of local music," says Cottrell-Boyce. "I was working on *Coronation Street* when Tony was a big wheel at Granada, so that was the world I was living in." Speaking of writing a film about Manchester when he's from Liverpool, he chuckles: "It gives me enormous satisfaction that wherever I go in Manchester now, there's a line that's more or less the unofficial motto of the city. It's on tea towels and mugs and it's all over the student halls-of-residence, which is actually written by a scouser, which was me. It's a ridiculous line. It says, '*This is Manchester, we do things differently here.*' It's attributed to Tony Wilson, but he never said it and never would have said it. It's from the film."

Cottrell-Boyce was born to Irish Catholic parents and has an Irish wife so our conversation turns to Irish music. He tells me how his sons learned to play fiddle at Comhaltas, and how this led to a particularly memorable experience. "The girls were practising Irish dancing on the lawn, and their brother came out and played this slip jig [The Bothy Band's 'Butterfly']. And I just remember that being one of those golden moments, these little barefoot girls dancing with their brother playing this beautiful jig." Did he ever pick up a fiddle himself? "I'm one of those dads who can't sit in the car park with the newspaper, so I had fiddle lessons when they had fiddle lessons. And I was dreadful, really terrible."

He mentions 'Arthur McBride' by Paul Brady as another favourite Irish song ("that's a good one for the party") before making a confession. "Now, this is very niche, but I've got a thing about anti-recruiting songs. I love them. 'Arthur McBride' is about two guys being asked to join the British Army and beating up the recruiting officer. Right. There's another one, The Pogues covered 'The Recruiting Sergeant', which is a similar theme." He saw The Pogues in Liverpool at one of their first shows, supporting Elvis Costello when they were still called Pogue Mahone. "That was, I'm going to say, 1983. I remember discussing whether to go and watch them or not because they were a support band. And then going in and, honestly, 30 seconds in, just jumping out of the seat. They were playing a lot of Irish covers, they were songs that were incredibly familiar, but blisteringly new. It was an incredible moment, like being given something back. I'm getting goose pimples just remembering that. It's one of my greatest musical memories."

> "I had fiddle lessons… And I was dreadful, really terrible"

We talk about The Imagined Village – which Cottrell-Boyce remembers in particular for their collaboration with Benjamin Zephaniah on 'Tam Lyn Retold' – and Eliza Carthy, and then he recalls a story about another fiddler. "I remember going to see [Dave] Swarbrick and it was incredibly moving because he was sitting down with an oxygen mask on his face and playing, and I was really aware of the difference between him and classical players, that he was coaxing music out. When you watch a classical player, you watch the precision and discipline and the operation of a machine. And watching him, it was more like watching Jacqueline du Pré, watching someone call something out of their soul. Another incredible memory."

Cottrell-Boyce is the Guest Director of this year's Brighton Festival which takes place throughout May and has a programme taking in music, theatre, dance, art, film, literature and more. Asked what music he's looking forward to from the programme, he replies: "The person that I'm so excited about being on is Mahan Esfahani, who's a harpsichordist. He's doing [Bach's] 'Goldberg Variations' on the harpsichord and it's mind-blowingly brilliant." He also mentions Kae Tempest – "do you know her song 'Love Harder'? It's inspirational, it's sort of the theme of the festival" – and Orchestra Baobab – "I love them, they really go back to something."

***+ Brighton Festival** runs from May 4 until May 26 across Brighton*

James Hole

FRANK COTTRELL-BOYCE'S *MY WORLD* PLAYLIST

The Bothy Band 'The Butterfly'
Paul Brady 'Arthur McBride'
Dolly Parton 'Barbara Allen'
The Imagined Village 'Tam Lyn Retold'
Johann Sebastian Bach – *Goldberg Variations*
Kae Tempest 'Love Harder'
Hoyt Curtin & His Orchestra 'Top Cat (Main Title)
The Pogues 'The Recruiting Sergeant / The Rocky Road to Dublin / Galway Races'

Sväng

Fiona Talkington unpacks the harmonica quartet's trajectory, from the mind of Finland's first mouth-harp graduate to an internationally acclaimed troupe with a repertoire ranging from Radiohead and *Harry Potter* to tango and Chopin

I'm sitting in a field at a festival. Climbing over a wooden fence nearby are four men wearing very smart suits. I think that was our first encounter, though there were many more to come: stone churches on Orkney, downtown Helsinki, London's Royal Opera House, and Jools Holland's New Year's Eve *Hootenanny*. Meet Sväng, Finland's extraordinary harmonica quartet who conjure up magic, melancholy and mischief across a range of instruments, from the tiny harmonica pulled out of a top pocket, to the earthy bass version that's the size of a toaster. It's hard not to fall under the spell of their quirky brilliance.

Their recent release, *Svängo Nuevo* (2024), continues to surprise – I learnt that dancing Finnish tango is like cross-country skiing, for example – and ever-present is their trademark creative curiosity and deep sense of humanity. They are the harmonica equivalent of the legendary Kronos Quartet.

It began in Helsinki in the early 2000s where Jouko Kyhälä – the Sibelius Academy's first harmonica graduate and Sväng founder – was teaching. Then student Eero Turkka was preparing for exams when Kyhälä suggested he compose for a harmonica band.

"But, is there a Finnish harmonica tradition?" I ask. "Oh yes!" Kyhälä answers emphatically, explaining a solo tradition which now has UNESCO Cultural Heritage status. But another inspiration for this new band, he tells me, was the Romanian group, Trio Polifonic. "We needed two more players," Kyhälä continues. Another student, Eero Grundström was an obvious choice, but finding a bass harmonica player wasn't so easy. Kyhälä approached Kimmo Pohjonen. He was too busy turning the accordion world upside-down but suggested Pasi Leino, another harmonicist with whom he'd been playing. So now, with Turkka's exams over, Sväng was born!

"We're four different personalities," says Kyhälä. As a teen, he was into rock, but hearing Finnish legend J Karjalainen changed things. Kyhälä studied at the Sibelius Academy with Pohjonen – a "mind-blowing" experience – and switched to harmonica as his main instrument. Turkka was stunned when he first heard Muddy Waters and Little Walter at age 13. Interested in Finnish folk, Grundström took up the harmonica at the Academy because, he says, it was a smaller companion than his harmonium. Leino's bass harmonica was gathering dust after his previous quartet disbanded, so he was delighted by this new eye- (and ear-) opening

Kimmo Syväri; Jimmy Traskelin

experience. Now that Leino has retired, he's been replaced by Tapani Varis, a well-known musician on the Finnish scene for decades and a one-time member of Värttinä. How could he refuse the chance to compose for the band, he says. After all, the bass harmonica is a very "cool instrument."

In 2005 Sväng released their self-titled first album. It catapulted them onto the music scene with their unique sound and an irresistible wit and brilliance over impossible dance rhythms, Finnish folk, Balkan beats, tango, blues and compelling melodies.

By the time *Jarruta* (2008) came along, Sväng had a worldwide fanbase and were exploring their own compositions, often inspired by beguiling Balkan rhythms, and performing with an exquisite clarity of sound and texture. Their take on the dark Finnish tango is ever-present. There's a taste, too, of the humanity that's an important thread throughout their music. Grundström's 'Deadline' emerges from the soul using new sounds and techniques, with notes bending and swaying with their breath, as haunting as an eastern call to prayer. But expect the unexpected too, such as pieces inspired by comic books or the sounds of fish breeding.

As *Schladtzshe!* (2010) arrived, Sväng's schedules became even busier with touring. In their compositions there's a sense of renewed confidence and risk-taking, continuing to turn off-the-wall ideas into irresistible music: a Finnish snake tune unites Swedish *polska* with Greek fiddle music, the Finnish traditional *humppa* dance gets a remake, and the same country's blues tradition is entwined with old hymn tunes via Radiohead. "We've always fought limitations, thinking more about what music we're interested in," says Grundström.

In 2010 the French Festival La Folle Journée de Nantes invited Sväng to arrange piano music by Chopin for harmonica. The result was an earthiness and sweetness that brought out the pathos and the Polish dance influences in Chopin's music. It gave Sväng the idea of turning to Finland's national composer, Sibelius. The 150th anniversary of his birth in 2015 was the perfect opportunity to realise that dream and consider, as Kyhälä puts it, "how to arrange the iconic, well-known orchestral works for four harmonicas." Sibelius' music is in their DNA, and you can sense this in their performances. "It's a special feeling," Grundström comments. "I noticed that we could play more freely with time, doing all the ritardandos and accelerandos together."

Also released was *Karja-La* (2014) – their homage to the Karelia region. It shows, Kyhälä tells me, that they had matured as composers, surprising even themselves with their variety. It's one of his favourite albums, deeply rooted in Finnish culture: traditional *runo* songs, heartfelt outpourings of age-old love stories and cross-border conflicts.

Sväng were on a roll. *Hauptbahnhof* (2017) was a gift to their fans, with all the old favourites, from traditional tunes to tango and Balkan rhythms, and new discoveries such as Grundström's arrangement of 'Hedwig's Theme' (the theme from the *Harry Potter* films).

> "We've always fought limitations, thinking more about what music we're interested in"

They returned to their favourite dance form in *Sväng Plays Tango* (2018). This deeply melancholic music is a Finnish icon, and Sväng added their own tangos to a national archive. In 2020 came one of their finest albums, *In Trad We Trust,* rooted in what they say is their spiritual home, Finnish folk, including the *kantele*, *jouhikko* and fiddle traditions given the zany Sväng treatment.

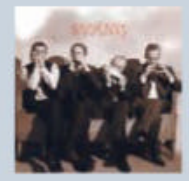
Over the years they've been involved in many collaborations but one of their biggest projects now is with an orchestra, Svängfonia, launched in 2022 with the Tapiola Sinfonietta, exploring wider timbres and textures. "We could never imagine what we would achieve with this group," says Kyhälä. "Sväng is a combination of being composer and arranger, being part of a physical unit, breathing together as one."

Keep on svänging! ◆

+ *Svängo Nuevo* *will be reviewed in our next issue, #199 (July 2024)*

L–R: Tapani Varis, Jouko Kyhälä, Eero Grundström and Eero Turkka

BEST ALBUMS

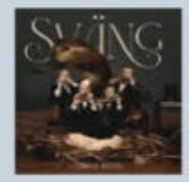


Sväng
(Aito Records, 2005)
The beginning. Sväng unleash their brilliance on the world, from Finnish dance to Balkan beats, ragtime, blues, from pathos to party.

Jarruta
(Aito Records, 2008)
The foursome are now really exploring new sounds and techniques with some astonishing results.

Sväng Plays Sibelius
(Jumi-Tuotanto Oy, 2015)
A tribute to Finland's great composer in the year marking 150 years since his birth. In this, Sväng find that they are musical soulmates.

In Trad We Trust
(Galileo, 2020)
Musical personalities and outstanding playing shine through in this tribute to Finnish folk music.



Svängo Nuevo
(Galileo, 2024)
Impossible to believe that the group can still break new ground, but they do!

IF YOU LIKE SVÄNG, TRY...

Kimmo Pohjonen, Samuli Kosminen & Kronos Quartet *Uniko*
(Ondine, 2011)
Finland's maverick accordion star and an inspiration to Sväng, Pohjonen teams up with the ground-breaking Kronos Quartet and Samuli Kosminen, taking all the musicians beyond their wildest dreams.

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DISPATCH FROM

Knoxville, TN, US

Catalina Maria Johnson heads to Tennessee's Big Ears Festival, a curated celebration of music and creativity that gets bigger each year

After hearing music colleagues rave about Big Ears Festival with near reverence, I first attended in 2022 and loved it so much that I returned to Knoxville, Tennessee this year to participate in the festival's 11th edition. To wander the magnificent soundscapes offered by this 'bestival,' as one colleague termed it, is an exercise in adventure, awe and delight in equal measure. It's difficult to describe the beloved event – renowned for genre-shattering curation since 2009 – without exhausting the English language's superlatives.

With over 200 performances in four days, Big Ears shapes for each listener an astonishing bespoke mixtape that encompasses new classical, electronic, jazz, folk, funk and global music (and a few unclassifiable sonic innovations) by artists from the emergent to the iconic. Their common ground is superb musicianship as well as a willingness to expand and redefine the limits of genre.

Hatis Noit performing at St John's Episcopal Cathedral

The setting of Big Ears also offers unexpected pleasures, located in the Great Valley of East Tennessee, at the headwaters of the Tennessee River. The Great Smoky Mountains frame the downtown area, home to some of the city's oldest buildings and the location of the fest's dozen-plus stages; many are in buildings repurposed as musical venues thanks to recent redevelopment.

The Mill & Mine is on Depot Avenue, which runs alongside the site of Knoxville's first 1855 railroad stations – an ideal location for Rhiannon Giddens and her Silkroad Ensemble's *American Railroad* project. The expansive, virtuosic ensemble shone a light on the people who actually built the railroads. Indigenous artist Pura Fé blew a conch shell to start the performance, and her chants and slide guitar playing led into a series of tunes that highlighted music by Indigenous, African-American, Irish, Chinese and other immigrant labourers.

Also at The Mill & Mine, regal Malian diva Fatoumata Diawara gave a fabulous performance. Diawara deployed elegant, silky vocals with impeccable phrasing while she played a white Fender Stratocaster, sharing a musical vision that is bold and innovative without ever losing the integrity of its Malian roots.

Boyd's Jig & Reel, whose name references Scots-Irish immigrants from several hundred years back, is across the tracks from The Mill & Mine. There, I caught several stellar performances. One discovery was Tennessee's own Joseph Allred, whose breath-taking guitar playing included not just compositions informed by his Appalachian roots but Arabic *maqam* structures. Argentinian singer/composer Sofia Rei and Peruvian master bassist Jorge Roeder shared a set of tango-imbued *boleros* and ballads that stunned the audience into rapt silence (before erupting into a standing ovation). And later that day, also within the same intimate confines of Jig & Reel, the walls shook and the floor bounced thanks to the joyful raucousness of a standing-room-only crowd when Mexican *cumbia*-punk-rockers Son Rompe Pera served up their beautifully berserk marimba solos. Down the road and also by the tracks, The Jackson Terminal (a former railroad freight depot) had Leyla McCalla sharing lilting Haitian-infused ballads.

Christian Stewart

Across downtown, the vaulted arches and stained-glass windows of St John's Episcopal Cathedral shimmered in the sunlight as multicultural hymns poured forth from London-based Japanese vocal composer and singer Hatis Noit. Inspired by *gagaku* as well as Bulgarian and Gregorian chanting, Noit looped her croons, cries and full-on operatic vocals to create lush tides of sounds.

There's also the opportunity at Big Ears to experience performances by jazz and pop icons. I managed to see musician and conceptual artist Laurie Anderson, master jazz pianist and composer Herbie Hancock and supreme pop renaissance wonder Jon Batiste on different nights at the Knoxville Civic Auditorium, a multipurpose coliseum with over 6,000 seats. Even in these massive spaces, the artists' connection with the audience is paramount and the intimacy is never lost. As one example, at the beginning of her performance, Anderson convinced the audience to scream for ten seconds (inspired by Yoko Ono's three-minute howling scream in response to the 2016 US Presidential election). And at the encore, Anderson led the audience in mesmerising *tai chi* moves.

These are just a few of my highlights of over two dozen performances in the course of a long weekend, yet one can do much more than attend concerts at Big Ears, as the programme includes films, poetry readings, panels, art exhibits, culinary workshops and a one-hour sound bath created and directed by musician and inventor Kenny Wollesen.

It's astounding to experience a festival presenting such uniformly sublime musicianship tendered with grace and care. I look forward to finding myself again in Knoxville, Tennessee at another Big Ears, just listening. ◆

MAY-JUNE 2024

Gig Guide

Nora Brown & Stephanie Coleman

Songlines picks...

Nora Brown & Stephanie Coleman
(May 13 – June 4, On Tour)
Be sure to catch this virtuoso banjo-and-fiddle duo for a proper dose of old-timey American sound

Vieux Farka Touré
(May 15-26, On Tour)
Nicknamed 'Hendrix of the Sahara', Vieux is continuing his father's legacy in his creation of stirring, skilled and soulful guitar work from the heart of Mali

Mohammad Syfkhan
(May 23, London)
The Kurdish musician is set to perform his new debut album, *I am Kurdish*, driven by his own mad and masterful *buzuq* playing

Crown (May 24 & June 15, South & North)
A chance to see Maria Tarokh's female-led production telling stories of identity and displacement through Persian dance and Sufi movement

Sarāb
(May 25-28, North & London)
The six-piece are set to share their kaleidoscopic, politically charged fusion of Arab and French influences across the UK

Jake Blount
(June 12-14, London & Ireland)
The banjo-wielding US folklorist heads to these shores to share his visionary, inclusive and educational roots music

LONDON

11 MAY Soumik Datta Queen Elizabeth Hall; **14 MAY Branco Stoysin** Bell House; **16 MAY Sarabanda** Queen of the South; **16-19 MAY *Songlines Encounters Festival*** Kings Place kingsplace.co.uk; **17 MAY Katherine Priddy** Union Chapel; **Jesse Cook** Queen Elizabeth Hall; **Sahra Halgan** The Jago; **Misagh Moradi** Rich Mix; **18 MAY Pongo** Hootananny Brixton; **Lena Chamamyan** Queen Elizabeth Hall; **Tarabband** Jazz Cafe; **21 MAY Emel Mathlouthi** Jazz Cafe; **22 MAY Miranda Rutter & Rob Harbron** Cecil Sharp House; **Suntou Susso** The Fox & Firkin; **23 MAY Mohammad Syfkhan** St Pancras Old Church; **Alasdair Fraser & Natalie Haas** Kings Place; **24 MAY Bukky Leo Afrobeat Quintet** The Portico; **Guayacan Orquesta** Electric Brixton; **25 MAY Sonu Nigam** OVO Arena Wembley; **Aley** Kings Place; **25-26 MAY Feria de Londres** Brick Lane Yard feriadelondres.com; **26 MAY Guyana Folk Festival** Oasis Academy, Croydon eventbrite.com; **Painted Sky** Green Note; **Mart'nália & Paulinho Moska** Jazz Cafe; **27 MAY Sarāb** Ronnie Scott's; **30 MAY Grupo Pilon + Ichigo Evil** Peckham Audio; **Cider with Molly + Maddi O'Brien** Uxbridge Folk Club; **31 MAY Julie Fowlis + Westward the Light** Kings Place; **1 JUN Magpie's Nest Festival** Master Shipwright's Palace thenestcollective.co.uk; **Ali Akbar Moradi Ensemble** Kings Place; **2 JUN Chesaba** Electric Brixton; **3 JUN Rubel** Jazz Cafe; **4 JUN BCUC** Jazz Cafe; **4-15 JUN Flamenco Festival** Sadler's Well sadlerswells.com; **4-22 JUN YAMATO Drummers of Japan** Peacock Theatre; **6 JUN BaianaSystem** Fabric; **7 JUN The Tamesas** The Harrison; **John McCusker** Kings Place; **7-15 JUN ALiF: Arts of Lebanon Festival** marsm.co.uk; **8 JUN Wil Sifontes & His Latin Sound Quintet** The Portico; **Bomrani** Lafayette; **8-9 JUN KS Chithra** Byron Hall; **9 JUN Lenine & Martin Fondse** Union Chapel; **11 JUN Akolá Tambó** Dalston Eastern Curve Garden; **12 JUN Jake Blount** Kings Place; **La Bomba de Tiempo** EartH; **13 JUN Sam Lee** Round Chapel; **Oysland Trio** Cuts; **15 JUN Sunanda Sharma** The Music Room.

SOUTH

17 MAY Tarren Saffron Hall, Saffron Walden; **Catrin Finch & Aoife Ní Bhriain** Trinity Centre, Ringwood; **Niladri Kumar** Turner Sims, Southampton; **Ran Kan Kan** Gladiator Club, Oxford; **17-19 MAY WOOD Festival** Wallingford woodfestival.com; **21 MAY Dulcimers** Halsway Manor, Crowcombe halswaymanor.org.uk; **Catrin Finch & Aoife Ní Bhriain** Donnington Priory, Newbury; **23 MAY Jon Boden** Ropetackle, Shoreham-by-Sea; **Jonathan Mayer & Kousic Sen** Corn Exchange, Newbury; **24-27 MAY Chippenham Folk Festival** chippfolk.co.uk; **24-27 MAY Elderflower Fields** Ashdown Forest elderflowerfields.co.uk; **25 MAY** [gig & workshop] **She'Koyokh** The Mowlem, Swanage; **The Often Herd** Fishery Wharf Cafe, Hemel Hempstead; **Jon Boden** Old Bakery Studios, Truro; **London Afrobeat Collective** The Forum, Tunbridge Wells; **Roberto Fonseca** Blackmore Gardens, Sidmouth; **26 MAY** [gig & workshop] **She'Koyokh** The Exchange, Sturminster Newton; **Roberto Fonseca + Alvorada** Brighton Dome; **27 MAY Flamenco Raices** Komedia Brighton; **30 MAY Julie Fowlis** St Andrew's Church, Hertford; **31 MAY Juan Martín** Lady St Mary Church, Wareham; **1-2 JUN Wessex Folk Festival** Weymouth wessexfolkfestival.com; **4 JUN Roberto Pla & His Latin Ensemble** Komedia, Bath; **7-9 JUN Wimborne Minster Folk Festival** wmff.co.uk; **Tangled Roots** Radford Mill, Timsbury tangledrootsfestival.com; **14 JUN Juan Martín** The Anvil, Basingstoke; **The Carrivick Sisters** Wiltshire Music Centre, Bradford on Avon; **14-16 JUN Falmouth International Sea Shanty Festival** falmouthseashanty.co.uk; **15 JUN CROWN** The Old Fire Station, Oxford; **15-16 JUN Catrin Finch & Aoife Ní Bhriain** Leith Hill Place, Dorking.

WALES & WEST

19 MAY Niladri Kumar St George's Bristol; **21 MAY Enji** Bristol Beacon; **24 MAY Jon Boden** Bristol Beacon; **24-26 MAY Fishguard Folk Festival** FREE fishfolkfest.co.uk; **28 MAY Chesaba** Marble factory, Bristol;

songlines.co.uk/gig-guide All information correct at time of going to press. Email listings for print and online consideration to listings@songlines.co.uk

30 MAY-3 JUN Fire in the Mountain Aberystwyth fireinthemountain.co.uk; **2 JUN VRï** Acapela Studio, Cardiff; **3 JUN Justin Adams & Mohamed Errebbaa** Crofter Rights, Bristol; **7-9 JUN Gower Folk Festival** gowerfolkfestival.co.uk; **9 JUN Ranjana Ghatak** St George's Bristol; **12 JUN Aoife O'Donovan** St George's Bristol; **13-16 JUN Beardy Folk Festival** Cleobury Mortimer beardyfolkfestival.co.uk; **15 JUN Rockhampton Folk Festival & World Music Festival** rockhamptonfolkfest.org.uk

MIDLANDS

10-12 MAY Folk on the Pier Cromer Pier folkonthepier.co.uk; **10-26 MAY Norwich & Norfolk Festival** nnfestival.org.uk; **16 MAY** [1pm] **Iryna Muha & Volodymyr Vasylenko** Town Hall, Birmingham FREE; **18 MAY Tarren** Voodoo Daddys, Norwich; **22 MAY Breabach** St Paul's Church, Nottingham; **24 MAY The Often Herd** Cambridge Folk Club; **25 MAY Sambroso Allstars** Norwich Arts Centre; **29 MAY Chesaba** The Level, Nottingham; **31 MAY Dan Walsh** Beeston Folk Club, Nottingham; **6 JUN Cahalen Morrison** The Courtyard, Hereford; **8 JUN Bhangra Symphonica** Town Hall, Birmingham; **16 JUN KS Chithra** Town Hall, Birmingham.

NORTH

16 MAY Raz & Afla Ramona, Manchester; **Niladri Kumar** Howard Assembly Room, Leeds; **17 MAY Sam Carter** The Peer Hat, Manchester; **17-19 MAY Lau-Land** Howard Assembly Room, Leeds operanorth.co.uk; **18 MAY Misagh Moradi** Band on the Wall, Manchester; **19 MAY Dan Walsh** Bijou Cinema, Southport; **20 MAY Enji** Band on the Wall, Manchester; **21 MAY Dan Walsh** Newton-in-Cartmel Village Hall; **22 MAY Voices for Gaza** Band on the Wall, Manchester bandonthewall.org; **23 MAY Breabach** The Greystones, Sheffield; **24 MAY CROWN** Mind the Gap, Bradford; **24-25 MAY Forgotten Lands** Carlisle forgottenlands.org; **24-27 MAY Chester Folk Festival** chesterfolk.org.uk; **25 MAY Breabach** The Met, Bury; **Sarāb** Band on the Wall, Manchester; **25 MAY-8 JUN Swaledale Festival** swalefest.org; **26 MAY Sarāb** The Glasshouse, Gateshead; **28 MAY Sarāb** Howard Assembly Room, Leeds; **Puerto Candelaria** Band on the Wall, Manchester; **31 MAY The Breath** Cobalt Studios, Newcastle upon Tyne; **Awake Arise** Howard Assembly Room, Leeds; **31 MAY-9 JUN Otley Music Festival** otley-music-festival.co.uk; **1 JUN Chesaba** The Leadmill, Sheffield; **AKA Trio** St Andrew's Church, Grinton; **7 JUN Amina Khayyam Dance + BIRD** Dance City, Newcastle upon Tyne; **9-11 JUN Hebden Bridge Folk Roots Festival** hebdenfolkroots.org; **14 JUN** [12.45pm] **Guiliano Modarelli & Kousic Sen** The Bridgewater Hall, Manchester FREE; **15 JUN Green Island Festival Vol I** Hulme Community Garden Centre greenislandfestival.co.uk

SCOTLAND

16 MAY The East Pointers King Tut's Wah Wah Hut, Glasgow; **17 MAY The East Pointers** Eastgate, Peebles; **17-19 MAY SpringGrass Bluegrass Festival** Newton Stewart tradmusic.com; **18 MAY The Often Herd** The Vault, Newton Stewart; **20-21 MAY The East Pointers** Glassel Hall, Banchory; **23-26 MAY Orkney Folk Festival** orkneyfolkfestival.com; **31 MAY Siobhan Miller** St Margaret's Braemar; **31 MAY-2 JUN The Arisaig Americana Music Festival** arisaigamericana.com; **1 JUN The Gathering** Inverness thegatheringscotland.com; **5 JUN Kris Drever** Queens Hall, Edinburgh; **6 JUN John McCusker** The Glee Club, Glasgow; **7-9 JUN Arran Folk Festival** arranfolkfestival.co.uk; **8-9 JUN The Reeling** Glasgow thereeling.com; **12 JUN Kris Drever** Cromarty Arts; **Malinky** Edinburgh Folk Club; **13 JUN Kris Drever** Nairn Community Arts; **Black Umfolosi** Universal Hall, Findhorn; **Gnoss** Eastgate, Peebles; **13-16 JUN Eden Festival** Moffat edenfestival.co.uk; **14 JUN Black Umfolosi** MacArts, Galashiels; **14-16 JUN Solas Festival** Errol solasfestival.co.uk; **Keith TMSA Festival** keithfestival.com; **15 JUN KS Chithra** Glasgow Academy.

IRELAND
(Republic & Northern)

10-12 MAY Fleadh Cheoil Chorcaí Douglas corkfleadh.ie; **15 MAY Jorge Drexler** National Concert Hall, Dublin; **18 MAY Sharon Shannon** Hotel Kilkenny; **24-26 MAY Féile Binn Éadair** Howth FREE feilebinneadair.com; **25 MAY-3 JUN Fleadh Nua** Ennis fleadhnua.com; **29-30 MAY NCH Gamelan Orchestra** National Concert Hall, Dublin; **5-9 JUN Galway Folk Festival** galwayfolkfestival.com; **10-11 JUN Tradition Now** National Concert Hall, Dublin nch.ie; **13 JUN Jake Blount** Mussenden Temple, Coleraine; **14 JUN Jake Blount** Market Place Theatre, Armagh; **14-16 JUN Fastnet Maritime and Folk Festival** Ballydehob fastnetmaritime.com; **Doolin Folkfest** doolinarts.ie

TOURS

Frankie Archer
Captivating electro-folk

12 MAY The Wight Bear, Southbourne; **18 MAY** Headroom House, Leeds; **19 MAY** Spring Bank Arts, New Mills; **21 MAY** Ruskin Mill, Nailsworth; **24 MAY** Stamford Arts Centre; **25 MAY** A Stone's Throw Festival, Newcastle-upon-Tyne; **26 MAY** Knockengorroch Festival; **7 JUN** Grand Junction, London; **8 JUN** Komedia, Brighton;**13 JUN** Knutsford Festival. *supporting Jim Moray. *frankiearchermusic.com*

Jack Badcock
Dallahan frontman on solo tour

16 MAY The Glad Cafe, Glasgow; **17 MAY** Southside, Lincoln; **18 MAY** Bridport Folk Society; **19 MAY** Green Note, London; **20 MAY** Ashburton Arts Centre; **21 MAY** St Neots Folk Club; **22 MAY** Willows Folk Club, Preston; **24 MAY** Folk at The Meadows, Belper; **25 MAY** Grewelthorpe Village Hall, Ripon; **30 MAY** The Polish Club, Kirkcaldy. *jackbadcock.com*

Adam Beattie + Fiona Bevan
Showcasing their new albums

15 MAY Lighthouse, Poole; **16 MAY** Courtyard, Hereford; **18 MAY** Lady & The Bear, Edinburgh; **19 MAY** Gathering South Sessions, Glasgow; **23 MAY** The Barn, Banchory; **26 MAY** The Strines Nightingale, Marple; **28 MAY** Hyde Tavern, Winchester; **29 MAY** Garden City Brewery, Letchworth; **30 MAY** Metronome, Nottingham; **1 JUN** Fire in the Mountain, Aberystwyth; **4 JUN** Temperance, Leamington Spa; **5 JUN** Cafe#9, Sheffield; **6 JUN** Music Hall, Ramsgate; **7 JUN** Sudbury Arts; **8 JUN** Anteros, Norwich; **9 JUN** Green Scythe Fair, Muchelney; **13 JUN** Cornish Bank, Falmouth; **14 JUN** Thimblemill Library, Birmingham. *adambeattie.com*

Nora Brown & Stephanie Coleman
Superb old-time banjo-fiddle duo

13 MAY Coughlans Bar, Cork; **14 MAY** Róisín Dubh, Galway; **16 MAY** Whelan's, Dublin; **18 MAY** The Duncairn, Belfast; **21 MAY** Regional Cultural Centre, Letterkenny; **22 MAY** Nice N Sleazy, Glasgow; **23 MAY** Orkney Folk Festival; **28 MAY** Tolbooth, Stirling; **29 MAY** The Cluny 2, Newcastle upon Tyne; **30 MAY** Selby Town Hall; **31 MAY** The Greystones, Sheffield; **1 JUN** St Mary's, Chester; **2 JUN** Fire in the Mountain, Aberystwyth; **4 JUN** Bush Hall, London. *norabrownmusic.com*

The Budapest Cafe Orchestra
Klezmer-Balkan-Russian energy!

21 MAY Dalswinton Village Hall; **22 MAY** The Swallow Theatre, Galloway; **23 MAY** Gaiety Theatre, Ayr; **24 MAY** Birnam Arts, Dunkeld; **25 MAY** Edinvillie Community Hall; **26 MAY** Rogart Mart; **27 MAY** Plockton Village Hall; **28 MAY** Glenelg Village Hall; **30 MAY** An Tobar, Tobermory; **31 MAY** Victory Hall, Benderloch; **1 JUN** Poolewe Village Hall; **2 JUN** Torridon Estate; **4 JUN** Las, Portree; **5 JUN** Lochinver Village Hall; **6 JUN** Ceilidh Place, Ullapool; **7 JUN** Astley Hall, Arisaig; **8 JUN** Moffat Town Hall. *budapestcafeorchestra.co.uk*

Brìghde Chaimbeul
Purveyor of Scottish smallpipes

12 MAY St John's College, Oxford FREE; **20 MAY*** St Swithin's Church, Bath; **30 MAY** The Fleece Inn, Bretforton; **31 MAY** Fire in the Mountain, Aberystwyth; **7 JUN*** St Peter's, Linlithgow; **8 JUN*** The Barn, Banchory; **9 JUN*** The Reeling, Glasgow; **15 JUN** Solas Festival, Errol. *with Aidan O'Rourke. *brichaimbeul.com*

Ahmed Dickinson Cárdenas & Eduardo Martín
Two acoustic guitars interweave

14 MAY Kenmare Butter Market; **15 MAY** St John's Theatre, Listowel; **16 MAY** Glór, Ennis; **17 MAY** The Dock, Carrick-on-Shannon; **18 MAY** The Séamus Ennis Arts Centre, Naul; **21 MAY** Ardhowen Theatre, Enniskillen; **23 MAY** The Glens Centre, Manorhamilton. *ahmeddickinson.com*

Fanna-Fi-Allah
Seven-piece qawwali ensemble

7 JUN Town Hall, Birmingham; **8 JUN** RNCM, Manchester; **9 JUN** The Y Theatre, Leicester; **12 JUN** Saint Luke's, Glasgow; **18 JUN** The Apex, Bury St Edmunds; **22 JUN** Union Chapel, London; **23 JUN** St George's Bristol. *fanna-fi-allah.com*

Vieux Farka Touré
Rare dates from Malian star

15 MAY Cambridge Junction; **16 MAY** Project House, Leeds; **17 MAY** Kings Place, London; **18 MAY** The Y Theatre,

Gig Guide

Leicester; **19 MAY** Barbican, London; **22 MAY** The Stoller Hall, Manchester; **23 MAY** Bristol Beacon; **24 MAY** The Cornish Bank, Falmouth; **25 MAY** The Cornish Bank, Falmouth; **26 MAY** Attenborough Centre, Brighton. *vieuxfarkatoure.com*

FitkinWall
Electro-folk duo tours Harpland
15 MAY Howard Assembly Rooms, Leeds; **17 MAY** Tolbooth, Stirling; **18 MAY** Queen's Hall, Edinburgh; **22 MAY** Sound Festival, Aberdeen; **23 MAY** Shetland Arts; **28 MAY** NCEM, York; **29 MAY** The Stables, Milton Keynes; **5 JUN** Lakeside, Nottingham; **11 JUN** The Anvil, Basingstoke. *fitkin.com*

Flook
Popular Anglo-Irish folk quartet
12 MAY* Station House Theatre, Clifden; **14 MAY*** The Sugar Club, Dublin; **15 MAY*** National Opera House, Wexford; **16 MAY*** Droichead Arts Centre, Drogheda; **17 MAY*** Regional Cultural Centre, Letterkenny; **18 MAY*** The Dock, Carrick-on-Shannon; **19 MAY*** Hawks Well Theatre, Sligo; **7 JUN** St James' Church, Emsworth; **8 JUN** Irish Cultural Centre, London; **9 JUN** Gulbenkian, Canterbury. *with Patsy Reid. *flook.co.uk*

Genticorum
Brilliant traditional Québécois trio
23-26 MAY Orkney Folk Festival; **29 MAY** Waterside Arts Centre, Sale; 30 May Kings Place, London; **31 MAY** Ropetackle, Shoreham-by-Sea; **1 JUN** The Arc, Winchester; **2 JUN** The Live Room, Saltaire. *genticorum.com*

Golden Shoals
Old-time duo from Nashville
1-2 JUN Fire in the Mountain, Aberystwyth; **5 JUN** What's Cookin', London; **6 JUN** Fishery Wharf Cafe, Boxmoor; **7 JUN** Linklater Pavilion, Lewes; **8 JUN** Norwegian Church Arts Centre, Cardiff; **9 JUN** Bristol Folk House; **11 JUN** Bere Regis Folk Night, Drax Arms; **12 JUN** Chidham and Hambrook Village Hall; **13 JUN** Carberrys, Norwich; **14 JUN** The Bear Club, Luton; **15 JUN** Cat Asylum Brewing Co, Collingham; **16 JUN** [4pm] The Cock Inn, Leek. *goldenshoals.com*

Granny's Attic
The inimitable English folk trio
12 MAY Folk at the Froize, Woodbridge; **13 MAY** Colchester Arts Centre; **14 MAY** Anteros Arts Foundation, Norwich; **15 MAY** Cecil Sharp House, London; **16 MAY** Norwegian Church Arts Centre, Cardiff; **17 MAY** Huntingdon Hall, Worcester; **18 MAY** Wadsworth Community Centre, Hebden Bridge; **7 JUN** Fenton Town Hall, Stoke-on-Trent. *grannysattic.org.uk*

Ibibio Sound Machine
Electro-afro-disco-funk
11 MAY Cathedral Quarter arts Festival, Belfast; **22 MAY** Wedgewood Rooms, Southsea; **23 MAY** Norwich Arts Centre; **25 MAY** Future Yard CIC, Birkenhead; **5 JUN** Cambridge Junction; **6 JUN** KOKO, London. *ibibiosoundmachine.com*

Peter Knight's Gigspanner
Led by legendary English fiddler
12 MAY The Hub at St Mary's, Lichfield; **14 MAY** St Andrew's Church, Wiveliscombe; **15 MAY** The Pavilion, Teignmouth; **16 MAY** Kingsand Community Hall; **18 MAY*** Carnglaze Caverns, Liskeard; **19 MAY*** The Pavilions, Exmouth; **20 MAY*** Marine Theatre, Lyme Regis; **22 MAY*** Huntingdon Hall, Worcester; **23 MAY*** The Stables, Milton Keynes; **24 MAY*** The Playhouse, Oxford; **25 MAY*** The Arts at St George's, Beckenham; **26 MAY*** Trinity Theatre, Tunbridge Wells; **28 MAY*** Pavilion Theatre, Worthing; **29 MAY*** The Haymarket, Basingstoke; **30 MAY*** Memorial Hall Theatre, Marlborough; **31 MAY*** Subscription Rooms, Stroud; **1 JUN*** Brewhouse Theatre/Taunton. *Saltlines with Raynor Winn. *gigspanner.com*

Lady Maisery
Folk trio tours Tender album
12 MAY Bridport Arts Centre; **15 MAY** Bristol Beacon; **16 MAY** Round Chapel, London; **17 MAY** Ashcroft Arts, Fareham; **18 MAY** South Street Arts, Reading; **19 MAY** Oxted Sessions. *ladymaisery.com*

The Langan Band
Enthralling Scottish threesome
16 MAY Universal Hall, Findhorn; **17 MAY** Drummonds, Aberdeen; **18 MAY** An Lanntair, Stornoway; **22 MAY** The Old Bridge Inn, Aviemore; **23 MAY** The Caves, Edinburgh; **24 MAY** Harbour Arts Centre, Irvine. *thelanganband.com*

Lon Dubh
Three-part folk harmonies
15 MAY The Barrel House, Totnes; **16 MAY** Green Note, London; **17 MAY** [+ Rachel Newton] Bristol Folk House; **21 MAY** NCI Centre, Cambridge; **23 MAY** Cafe#9, Sheffield; **24 MAY** City Screen Picturehouse, York; **26 MAY** HareMoon Camp, Cambridge; **28 MAY** The Folklore Rooms, Brighton; **29 MAY** Mycelium Space, Frome; **31 MAY** Fire in the Mountain, Aberystwyth. *linktr.ee/londubhmusic*

Lost Songs of Scilly
John Elliott and Piers Lewin
5 JUN The Railway, Winchester; **6 JUN** The Kitchen Garden Cafe, Birmingham; **7 JUN** Tolmen Centre, Constantine; **9 JUN** Cafe#9, Sheffield; **10 JUN** The Lightship, Blyth; **11 JUN** Thornton Hough Village Hall, Wirral; **13 JUN** Lynton Town Hall; **14 JUN** St Anne's, Barnstaple; **15 JUN** Ashburton Arts Centre, Newton Abbot; **18 JUN** Pound Arts, Corsham; **19 JUN** Green Note, London; **20 JUN** Lighthouse, Poole. *lostsongsofscilly.com*

Daniel Martinez
And his Flamenco Company
12 MAY West Road Concert Hall, Cambridge; **17 MAY** Music Hall, Aberdeen; **18 MAY** Gardyne Theatre, Dundee; **19 MAY** Glasgow Royal Concert Hall; 13 Jun Old Fire Station, Carlisle; **14 JUN** Central Hall, York; **15 JUN** Princess Hall, Cheltenham; **16 JUN** Pavilion Dance South West, Bournemouth; **17 JUN** New Theatre Royal, Portsmouth. *danielmartinezflamenco.com*

Anna Mudeka
A homage to Miriam Makeba
17 MAY Storyhouse, Chester; **18 MAY** mac, Birmingham;**30 MAY** Derby Theatre; **31 MAY** Westacre Theatre, King's Lynn; **1 JUN** The Corn Hall, Diss. *annamudeka.co.uk*

Mugenkyo Taiko Drummers
The exhilarating Japanese drum
12 MAY New Theatre Royal, Portsmouth; **14 MAY** Newbury Spring Festival; **15 MAY** The Stables, Milton Keynes; **16 MAY** Lyceum Theatre, Crewe; **17 MAY** Queen's Hall, Hexham; **18 MAY** The Baths Hall, Scunthorpe; **19 MAY** The Fire Station, Sunderland; **8 JUN** Assembly Rooms, Edinburgh. *taiko.co.uk*

Rachel Newton
Intimate Scottish harpist-singer
15 MAY Cumbernauld Folk Club; **16 MAY** Black Swan Folk Club, York; **17 MAY** [+ Lon Dubh] Bristol Folk House; **18 MAY** Pounds Arts, Corsham; **19 MAY** Hanger Farm Arts, Totton. *rachelnewtonmusic.com*

Karine Polwart
Conversational solo shows
21 MAY Norwich & Norfolk Festival; **22 MAY** Foxlowe Arts Centre, Leek; **23 MAY** Newhampton Arts Centre; **24 MAY** Birdwell, Barnsley; **25 MAY** The Brunton, Hadstock; **26 MAY** The Byre Theatre, St Andrews; **1 JUN** FyneFest, Glen Fyne. *karinepolwart.com*

Rum Ragged
Canadians tour Gone Jiggin'
23 MAY Orkney Folk Festival; **29 MAY** Burnley Mechanics; **30 MAY** Bleasdale Parish Hall, Preston; **31 MAY** The Market Theatre, Ledbury; **3 JUN** Chorley Library; **6 JUN** Drimpton Village Hall; **7 JUN** Broadmayne Village Hall; **8 JUN** Eardisley Village Hall; **11 JUN** Casterton Village Hall; **12 JUN** UTASS, Middleton-in-Teesdale; **13 JUN** Wingates Village Institute, Blyth. *rumragged.com*

Jack Rutter
Outstanding Yorkshire folk singer
14 MAY Hoy at Anchor Folk Club, Leigh-on-Sea; **17 MAY** Bishops House, Sheffield; **18 MAY** Everyman Theatre, Cheltenham; **23 MAY** Orkney Folk Festival; **3 JUN** Stockton Folk Club; **5 JUN** Cecil Sharp House, London. *jackruttermusic.com*

Sam Sweeney
Bellowhead fiddler with band
5 JUN Marine Theatre, Lyme Regis; **6 JUN** The Brewhouse, Burton upon Trent; **7 JUN** Brewery Arts, Kendal; **8 JUN** Settle Victoria Hall; **9 JUN** Cambridge Junction. *samsweeneymusic.com*

Talisk
Scottish trio that packs a punch!
12 MAY Liverpool Academy; **13 MAY** The Arc, Winchester; **14 MAY** The Stables, Milton Keynes; **15 MAY** Ropetackle, Shoreham-by-Sea; **16 MAY** Marine Theatre, Lyme Regis; **17 MAY** Cambridge Junction; **18 MAY** Perth Concert Hall; **19 MAY** Brudenell Social Club, Leeds; **21 MAY** The Globe, Cardiff; **22 MAY** Metronome, Nottingham; **23 MAY** Georgian Theatre, Stockton-on-Tees; **24 MAY** Tait Hall, Kelso; **26 MAY** Fèis Ìle, Isle of Islay; **8 JUN** Galway Folk Festival. *talisk.co.uk*

Wayward Jane
Exploring American folk traditions
18 MAY Nettleham Live, Lincoln; **19 MAY** Peggy's Skylight, Nottingham; **22 MAY** Settle Victoria Hall; **23 MAY** Conway Hall, London; **24 MAY** Square & Compass, Worth Matravers; **25 MAY** Cambridge Junction; **26 MAY** Wrecking Ball Arts Centre, Hull; **31 MAY** Arisaig Americana Music Festival. *waywardjane.com*

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TEILHARD FROST Saturday 20

AUGUST

DERVISH Sunday 4
RYAN YOUNG Tuesday 6
THE BOOKSHOP BAND Thursday 8
LE VENT DU NORD Thursday 15
MOKOOMBA Tuesday 20
JULIAN TAYLOR Thursday 22
JAKE VAADELAND AND THE STURGEON RIVER BOYS Wednesday 28
MÁNRAN Thursday 29

AUTUMN

HONEY AND THE BEAR Friday 13 September
SECKOU KEITA Saturday 26 October
STEVE KNIGHTLEY Friday 8 November
KRIS DREVER Wednesday 13 November

REGISTERED CHARITY NO: 1109381

JUNE–JULY 2024

Festival Guide

Erwan Keravec

Jean de Pena

REVIEW

Babel MusicXP
Marseille, France
March 28-30

Marseille, with its idyllic location on the Mediterranean sea surrounded by white limestone hills, was the perfect host for Babel Music XP, a major annual forum bringing together artists and music industry personnel from Africa, America, Asia and Europe. The event took place in two historic buildings maintained in a state redolent of the city's industrial past. The trade fair, debates and meetings were held in a former tobacco factory (La Friche de la Belle de Mai), while an enormous warehouse on the harbour (Dock des Suds), previously used to stock sugar from the Indian Ocean, accommodated the multiple concerts which took place after nightfall. In this momentous edifice several thousand people were easily able to move between the three main stages.

With her Réunionese Creole and French folk, Oriane Lacaille offered a serene yet lively set together with drummer Héloïse Divilly and Yann-Lou Bertrand on double bass, trumpet and flute. With ukulele and *aouicha* (a small Gnawa lute) in hand, the singer-songwriter graciously paid vibrant homage to the emblematic *maloya* and *sega* rhythms of La Réunion Island. Alternating tenderness and rage she tackled love, maternity, domestic violence, migration and slavery, with her voice clear and powerful. The trio worked perfectly together and at certain moments, inspired by their rapport, Lacaille and Bertrand would dance to undulating ternary patterns. Exceptional Basque vocalist Julen Achiary and his quartet Haratago delivered a truly bewitching act revealing the force of *basa ahaide*, a cappella modal melodies produced by mountain shepherds of the Basque country. Adding Caucasian and Turkish sounds to these treasures through the use of clarinets, *duduk*, hurdy-gurdy, banjo, *viola da gamba* and double bass, the four musicians generated such an intense atmosphere that there was absolute silence from the packed crowd.

SANAM arrived especially from Beirut to give a ritualistic performance. Their music was everything except joyful. It was loud, penetrating, impressive, addictive and beautiful. Leader Sandy Chamoun recited Lebanese contemporary poetry as if her life was at stake over dark and expansive textures shaped by *buzuk* player Farah Kaddour, together with a drummer, bassist, guitarist and an electronics wizard. The instruments were often noisy, creating an effect whereby the Arabic poetry seemed to be floating above apparent chaos. It was as if they wanted to capture and portray the pain suffered by the people of Beirut. We were totally floored. *8 Pipers for Philip Glass* was another highlight of this year's event. Highland bagpiper, composer and improviser Erwan Keravec from Brittany had the brilliant idea to transpose four minimalist pieces, written in 1969 by American composer Philip Glass, for bagpipes and bombards. Pipers repeated Glass' very short sequences, each interweaving with the other, playing repeatedly with a high control over their sound to generate a state of trance. The result was mesmerising.

PIERRE CUNY

LISTINGS

May 31 – June 2
MTN Bushfire
Malkerns, Eswatini
bush-fire.com

June 6-8
Musiques Métisses
Angoulême, France
musiques-metisses.com

June 7-9
Sakifo Festival
Saint-Pierre, La Réunion
sakifo.com/festival

June 12-16
¡Rio Loco!
Toulouse, France
rio-loco.org

June 15-16
Houtfestival
Haarlem, The Netherlands
houtfestival.nl

June 20-23
Telluride Bluegrass Festival
Telluride, Colorado, US
bluegrass.com/telluride

June 21-23
Les 5 Continents
Martigny, Switzerland
5continents.ch

June 22-29
Festspillene i Nord-Norge
Harstad, Norway
festspillnn.no/en

June 23-30
Jewish Culture Festival
Kraków, Poland
jewishfestival.pl/en

June 26 – July 1
Smithsonian Folklife Festival
Washington, DC, US
'*Indigenous Voices of the Americas*' is this year's theme with Indigenous artists, chefs, musicians, dancers, athletes and storytellers in attendance to celebrate the living traditions of Indigenous peoples.
festival.si.edu

June 28-30
Nuits de Nacre
Tulle, France
accordeon.org

June 28-30
Rainforest World Music Festival
Sarawak, Malaysia
rwmf.net

June 29 – July 6
Roskilde
Roskilde, Denmark
roskilde-festival.dk/en

July 3-7
Førde Traditional and World Music Festival
Førde, Norway
Aziza Brahim, Puuluup, LINA_, Julie Fowlis, Boubacar Traoré, LADAMA and Kobo Town are just some of the names heading to Norway's picturesque fjords this year.
fordefestival.no

July 4-7
Clandestino
Gothenburg, Sweden
clandestinofestival.org

July 4-7
Rudolstadt Festival
Thuringia, Germany
rudolstadt-festival.de

July 6-7
Afrika Festival Herme
Hertme, The Netherlands
openluchttheaterhertme.nl/afrikafestival

July 8-14
Kaustinen Folk Music Festival
Kaustinen, Finland
kaustinen.net

July 8-14
Les Suds à Arles
Arles, France
suds-arles.com

July 9-21
Nuits D'Afrique
Montréal, Canada
festivalnuitsdafrique.com

July 10-13
Les Déferlantes Festival
Argelès-sur-Mer, France
festival-lesdeferlantes.com

July 10-13
Riddu Riđđu
Gáivuotna-Kåfjord, Norway
riddu.no/en

July 11-14
Winnipeg Folk Festival
Winnipeg, Canada
winnipegfolkfestival.ca

July 17-20
Colours of Ostrava
Ostrava, Czech Republic
colours.cz

July 19-21
Globaltica
Gdynia, Poland
globaltica.pl

July 19-21
Vancouver Folk Music Festival
Vancouver, Canada
thefestival.bc.ca

July 20 – August 4
Fiest'A Sète
Sète, France
fiestasete.com

July 20-27
FMM Sines
Sines, Portugal
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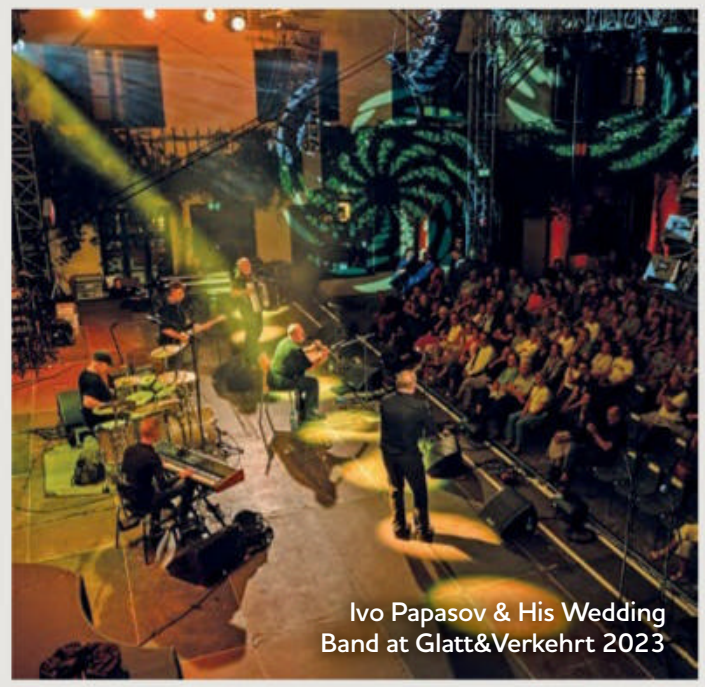
en.fmmsines.pt

July 25-28
Viljandi Folk Music Festival
Viljandi, Estonia
viljandifolk.ee/en

*FOR UK FESTIVALS PLEASE SEE OUR UK FESTIVAL GUIDE (P38–45)



Ivo Papasov & His Wedding Band at Glatt&Verkehrt 2023

PREVIEW

Festival Glatt&Verkehrt

WHEN: July 12-28

WHERE: Krems an der Donau, Austria

What the festival says:

'Music is encounter. Music needs a counterpart. It is about hearing and listening. Since its very beginnings, Glatt&Verkehrt, the festival for contemporary musical ideas from all around the globe, has always been a place of encounters between musicians from different regions of the world who create something new together. Encounters between artists and the audience. Encounters between the audience and previously unheard music.'

What we said:

'The programming is done without any self-imposed limitations. So don't be surprised if you see a classical pianist like Paul Gulda get on stage with a taraf (small folk group) of Roma musicians to demonstrate how composers like Haydn and Liszt worked Gypsy motifs into their compositions, or if experimental musicians from Indonesia offer a glimpse of the alternative music scene in their homeland. But Glatt&Verkehrt isn't just about oddities and fringe phenomena. They'll also present certified party animals like Fanfaraï and current world music stars like Malian songstress Fatoumata Diawara.'

Who's playing?

As per this year's theme of '*Encounters*' there's plenty of interesting partnerships with Hans Theessink and Pakistan's Ustad Noor Bakhsh sharing the stage on the opening night, two great but very different duos coming on the following night (Almir Meskovic & Daniel Lazar and Magalí Sare & Manel Fortià) as well as Leyla McCalla, Oumou Sangaré, Mari Kalkun and Lakha Khan over the 2+ weeks of festivities.

ONLINE: glattundverkehrt.at

Sascha Osaka / Glatt&Verkehrt

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WWW.GLATTUNDVERKEHRT.AT
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Arthur Verocai, at the recording sessions for his debut album

How a group of vinyl obsessives from the US and Europe rediscovered a Brazilian avant-garde gem from 1972, leading to its world premiere in Los Angeles and the second coming of its maker, Arthur Verocai

"I'm a son of *bossa nova*," says Arthur Verocai. "I started playing [bossa nova] guitar, I had classical music lessons on the guitar, I was fascinated by the arrangements." At the time Verocai had just graduated as a civil engineer, but he only lasted two months in the profession. It was Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in the 60s and Verocai was getting swept up by the bossa nova craze stirring around him. "I decided to focus on music," he says, "perfecting myself in orchestration." Clearly, he had a talent. Before long, he was writing songs for Leny Andrade, Ivan Lins and Milton Banana Trio, then as the 60s turned into the 70s he became the arranger on iconic albums such as Jorge Ben's *Negro é Lindo*, Erasmo Carlos' *Carlos, Erasmo...* and O Têrço's psychedelic self-titled debut. He was at the forefront of Brazil's musical vanguard. After impressing his record label with his arrangements for Célia's second album he was given the opportunity to record an album of his own in 1972, and he went for it. Opener 'Caboclo' has Verocai plucking his guitar and singing mournfully over a gurgling synth (one of the first synths to appear on record in Brazil), along with string and choir sections that build and build until erupting into a samba-jazz passage to make Marcos Valle swoon. 'Pelas Sombras' swings even harder, its organs, horn and bass decorating Verocai's sweet croon. Then there's 'Na Boca do Sol', one of those arrangements that can't be explained, string section, band and vocals joined at the seams, the groove never predictable, powered by some unknowable force.

"I have good memories of recording my first album," remembers Verocai. "It took just over a month to make." But, there was a problem. "I hoped for a good reception from the music market, but it didn't happen," he laments. The story goes that his record label Continental decided to take copies of Verocai's self-titled album off the shelves so that they could fit more copies of Secos & Molhados' debut album, which was having a moment. Not only that, but it affected his standing as one of Rio's brightest arrangers. "When the album was released, my image became distorted because the album was avant-garde, and this created fear among my clients. They stopped trusting me, thinking I would do the same with other artists, and I stopped making arrangements."

Verocai still worked with Jorge Ben, Ivan Lins and Tim Maia as the 70s progressed, but the work was drying up. "By the end of the 80s I was making music for advertising, jingles and soundtracks," he confesses. At the same time, a group of Brazil-mad vinyl collectors in Europe and the US discovered his solo debut, with one person purportedly buying an original version for $2,000 (others claim that a copy went for $4,500 in the mid-2010s). Verocai first heard about the growing admiration outside Brazil for his album in the 90s and he began to rebuild his career, putting out a small press of the bossa nova-influenced *Saudade Demais* in 2002. A year later, the California-based label Luv N' Haight reissued Verocai's debut, the hip-hop producer MF Doom sampled 'Na Boca Do Sol' in 2005 and then London's Far Out Recordings asked him to make another album, which became 2007's *Encore*. But the real moment that enshrined the album's classic status was when Brian Cross (aka B+), an Irish photographer based in Los Angeles and one-half of the production company Mochilla, asked Verocai to perform the album in full in the US. It was part of a *Timeless* series that also featured Mulatu Astatke. "At first I was surprised when I received the proposal to relaunch this work, but I still believed in [it] and it was great because it was time to listen with different ears and understand better," remembers Verocai. "I felt valued... I was in a beautiful, packed theatre with 1,200 people in Los Angeles shouting my name. It was actually the worldwide launch of the album."

Since then, Verocai's debut has been reissued multiple times, including a 50th-anniversary edition by Mr Bongo. He has released further albums and had a second life as an arranger, working with Brazilian (Xenia França, Rogê, Marisa Monte) and international (Quantic, Sébastien Tellier, BADBADNOTGOOD) artists. He's also regularly on the road, which seems to be where he's happiest. When asked his favourite moments from his career, he replies: "The shows that I have made around the world, like the last tour of the US where I played to sold-out theatres."

As told by Russ Slater Johnson

*+ **Arthur Verocai** will perform his self-titled debut album at the Barbican on June 28*

Fernando Bergamaschi (courtesy of Now-Again Records)

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Winchester, England	The Arc	JUNE 1
Saltaire, England	The Live Room	JUNE 2
Lewis, Scotland	HebCelt Festival	JULY 17-20
Inverness, Scotland	Eden Court Under Canvas	JULY 21
Stirling, Scotland	Tollbooth	JULY 25
Settle, England	Victoria Hall	JULY 26
Malmesbury, England	WOMAD	JULY 27
Cambridge, England	Cambridge Folk Festival	JULY 28

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SPEAKER'S CORNER

Macdara Yeates pays tribute to one of Belfast's most beloved singers, songwriters and cultural agitators, known for his generosity as much as his radical politics

This May marks the first anniversary of the death of the great Joe Mulheron, folk singer, songwriter, publican, left-wing activist and member of the Belfast folk group The Men of No Property (later The People of No Property). Few could claim to bring such humour, to perform with such panache, and to speak such truth to power in a lifetime of political folk songs. In a repertoire spanning nearly six decades, Joe covered a lot of ground: the chosen attire of the Palestine Liberation Organisation; an Irish *brigadista*'s journey across the Ebro river in the Spanish Civil War; the vivid horrors of Derry's Bloody Sunday; and much more.

Joe Mulheron was born into a Catholic household in Carrick Hill, Belfast in 1947. By the time he reached adulthood, he would find himself in the maelstrom of a city deep in conflict, rife with political fervour and rich creativity. In the late 1960s, he formed The Men of No Property, a ragged band of left-wing folkies who counted traditional singer Dave Scott and cartoonist Brian Moore among their ranks. Responding to their environment, they quickly amassed a catalogue of radical anthems, singing about petrol bombs, rubber bullets and the day-to-day life in what they affectionately termed 'England's Vietnam.' In the early 1970s, they struck a deal with New York's Paredon Records and released a string of albums with titles like *This is Free Belfast!* and *Ballads from Behind the Barricades*, to name a few. Their sleeve notes doubled as Civil Rights scrapbooks, complete with newspaper clippings, satirical cartoons and word-for-word transcriptions of speeches by Bernadette Devlin. To evade persecution (and the tax man), they released the albums under pseudonyms, with Joe taking up the alias 'Barney Macilvogue'. Their adventures brought them on tours of Ireland, England and further afield. And for a decade, they flew the flag for a practically voiceless community, broadcasting their hopes and fears to anyone who would listen.

But Joe Mulheron was much more than a musician. After his years in Belfast, he relocated to Derry and founded the beloved Sandinos Bar, an iconic Ulster music venue and a shrine to radical politics the world over. He became active in the local arts scene, where, among other things, he supported local theatre companies and spearheaded a citywide photography project educating schoolchildren about the Spanish Civil War. Indeed, Joe's generosity and support were known right across the Maiden City. After his recent passing, Paul Connolly of The Wood Burning Savages remembered Joe as a steadfast champion of independent music, remarking, "He was always eager to give the room upstairs [in Sandinos] for folks putting on their own gigs,

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of any genre. A giant of kindness." A spokesperson for the Bloody Sunday Trust organization described Joe as '*a long-time supporter of the campaign for truth and justice.*'

Joe continued writing and performing right up until his death, making regular iconic performances at the Inishowen Singing Weekend, among others. His song, 'The Free State Adjudicator', became his calling card, a searing indictment of the judges at the Fleadh Cheoil music festival and their partitionist bias against singers from the six counties of Northern Ireland. In recent years, he took the initiative to record much of his later solo work, with mischievously titled records such as *Songs That Nearly Freed Ireland* by '*Macilvogue, Last of The Men of No Property.*' And how lucky we are that he did.

On May 10-12, comrades of Joe's will meet in Sandinos for a weekend of song in celebration of a great man, one who faced life with humour, humanity and a deep sense of right and wrong. Of all the great bards of The Troubles, Joe was not as widely celebrated as The Wolfe Tones or some of his closer contemporaries, but for those of us lucky enough to make his acquaintance, his presence will be felt, and greatly missed, for many years to come. To quote a line from Joe's anti-fascist anthem, 'The Connolly Column', '*Who will call the meeting now and who will take the chair? / Who will lead us out on strike and demand an equal share?*' Who indeed? ◆

Colm Keating

ABOUT MACDARA

Macdara Yeates is a traditional singer, producer and multi-instrumentalist from Dublin, Ireland, described as *'a deep and powerful performer'* by *Irish Music Magazine*

Mulheron in 2022 at the Inishowen Singing Weekend; Right: singing for bandmember Brian Moore and others in his heyday

SONGLINES
ESSENTIAL
10

BAGPIPE ALBUMS

Criminally castigated and distinctly uncool, bagpipes are a mainstay of many traditional musics and are also increasingly finding favour as an experimental instrument of choice. ***Chris Wheatley*** picks out ten albums filled with more than just hot air

01 Davy Spillane
Atlantic Bridge
(Tara, 1987)

A master of the *uilleann* pipes (Irish bagpipes), this was the Grammy-winning player's first solo album, full of effortlessly fluid and engaging material. The spells Spillane weaves will leave you breathless, not least thanks to some superstar backing from banjo wizard Béla Fleck and folk legend Christy Moore. Spillane's other credits include collaborations with Kate Bush, Elvis Costello, Mike Oldfield and a host of other greats.

02 Ro:Toro
Estonian Bagpipe
(Tutl, 2006)

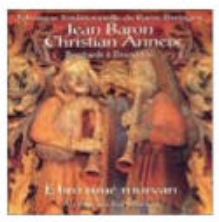
The tradition of bagpipe, or *torupill*, playing in Estonia dates back hundreds of years but modern ensemble Ro:Toro, although classically trained, have added a modern twist, incorporating multi-layered percussion, saxophone and elements of jazz improvisation to create something quite special. In this innovative quartet's hands, water basins, bicycle spokes and even electric guitar are transformed beyond recognition. Permeating throughout you'll hear the driving power of Sandra Sillamaa and Cätlin Jaago's pipes.

03 Various Artists
Bagpipes of Greece
(Topic Records, 2005)

A fascinating collection put together by noted ethnomusicologist Wolf Dietrich, these historic field recordings capture traditional bagpipe music as played by shepherds and peasants across the Greek islands. Once in danger of extinction, the art of making and playing the various forms of bagpipe found in this part of the world has recently enjoyed a revival.

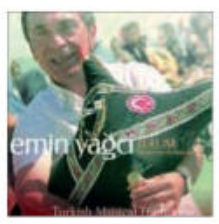
04 Mohsen Sharifian
Luka
(Zang Records, 2022)

Born in the Southern Iranian province of Bushehr, multi-instrumentalist and composer Mohsen Sharifian is among that country's most important artists when it comes to preserving and promoting traditional folk music and dance. His *ney-anbān* bagpipe plays a prominent role on this wonderfully evocative set, where clashing hand percussion rhythms circle underneath intoxicating melodies and drones.



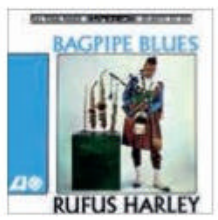
05 Jean Baron & Christian Anneix
E Bro Roué Morvan
(Keltia Musique, 2000)

The title of this intriguing album refers to the Breton king, Morvan (d818), who ascended to the throne following the death of Charlemagne. This collection of ancient folk tunes is performed by two masters of their craft, on the high-pitched *binioù kozh* bagpipe and the *bombarde* (a type of oboe) – the interplay between the two instruments is mesmerising.



06 Emin Yağci
Tulum: A Sound from the Black Sea
(Felmay, 2011)

A droneless bagpipe with two chanters (the part of the instrument on which the melody is played), the *tulum* is native to the Black Sea region of Turkey, and nobody has done more to promote its sound than Emin Yağci, who died in 2023. With percussion, chants and the distinctive flowing tones of the tulum, this is a terrific collection of recordings.



07 Rufus Harley
Bagpipe Blues
(Atlantic, 1965)

Bagpipes and jazz may seem an unlikely combination. Indeed, the extraordinary Rufus Harley is one of the plucky few pioneers to have attempted it. This wonderful album boggles the mind and enchants the ears with its melding of martial sounds, free-wheeling bop and Harley's mercurial playing. The amalgam of styles may not be for all, but those who love it will really love it.

08 Orchestra Macaroon
Breakfast in Balquhidder
(Backshore Productions, 2004)

There's an indefinable, extra-special quality about *Breakfast in Balquhidder*, a record on which the eclectically minded Orchestra Macaroon are joined by an international cast of guest musicians. The results sound like nothing else – an irresistible and constantly surprising mix of cool jazz and global folk sounds, where grand piano and double bass blend organically with the smooth drones of the bagpipes.

09 Martyn Bennett
Bothy Culture
(Rykodisc, 1998)

Where to start with Martyn Bennett? The Canadian-Scottish bagpiper's music elevated the art of Celtic fusion to a place where electronic experimentation and abstract ideas blossomed and swayed while retaining a warming, human feel. Bennett passed away at the age of only 33, but he leaves behind an extraordinarily enjoyable, if tragically small, catalogue of work, full of humour and excitement.

10 Afro Celt Sound System
Volume 1: Sound Magic
(Real World, 1996)

A mainstay of WOMAD for years, the ground-breaking Gaelic-West African ensemble's list of collaborators includes the likes of Robert Plant, Peter Gabriel, Sinéad O'Connor and Davy Spillane. The band possess a fine knack for producing silky smooth, highly polished future-folk which never loses sight of its traditional heart. This, their debut, still sounds fresh and enticing, with the *uilleann* pipes featuring strongly throughout.

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